

## Original Research Article

# Influence of male targeted short message service on knowledge, nature of attitude and male involvement on uptake of family planning among spouses in Marsabit County, Kenya

Vincent O. Matoke<sup>1,2\*</sup>, Eliphas M. Gitonga<sup>1</sup>, Isaac O. Owaka<sup>3</sup>, Geoffrey M. Okari<sup>4</sup>, Michel Mutabazi<sup>5</sup>, Gideon M. Ogutu<sup>2</sup>, Felix B. Odhiambo<sup>2</sup>, Daniel K. Anyika<sup>2</sup>, Ruth Salima<sup>2</sup>, Douglas S. Okenyuru<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of Environmental and Occupational Health, School of Health Sciences, Kenyatta University, Nairobi, Kenya

<sup>2</sup>Department of Community Health and Development, Faculty of Science, The Catholic University of Eastern Africa, Nairobi, Kenya

<sup>3</sup>Department of Family Medicine, Community Health and Epidemiology, School of Health Sciences, Kenyatta University, Nairobi, Kenya

<sup>4</sup>Department of Health Management and Informatics, School of Health Sciences, Kenyatta University, Nairobi, Kenya

<sup>5</sup>Department of Health Systems Management and Development, School of Public Health, Amref International University, Nairobi, Kenya

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### \*Correspondence:

Dr. Vincent O. Matoke,

E-mail: [omwengavincent96@yahoo.com](mailto:omwengavincent96@yahoo.com)

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## ABSTRACT

**Background:** Family planning services helps the individuals or couples to regulate the number and determine healthy spacing and timing of pregnancies. Globally, contraceptive prevalence stands at 49.0%, Sub-Saharan Africa at 29.0%, Kenya at 56.9% and Marsabit County at 5.6%. Some of the reasons given for low uptake include low knowledge level, negative attitude and lack of male involvement on family planning matters. This study aimed at establishing the influence of male targeted short message service on knowledge, nature of attitude and male involvement on uptake of family planning among spouses in Marsabit County.

**Methods:** A pre-test and post-test quasi experimental study design was adopted involving randomly selected 220 couples from Laisamis (control group) and Moyale (intervention group) sub-counties. Intervention of male targeted short message service was offered weekly to male spouses from Moyale sub-county. A questionnaire was used to collect data. Data analysis was done using SPSS. All the required ethical and logistical considerations were adhered to accordingly.

**Results:** Male targeted short message service increased level of knowledge significantly (OR 4.173,  $p=0.001$ ), changed nature of attitude (OR 2.7335,  $p=0.004$ ) and male involvement in family planning (OR 4.4306,  $p=0.001$ ).

**Conclusions:** The study concluded male targeted SMS intervention increased level of knowledge, attitude changed and males were involved. The County government of Marsabit should engage opinion leaders in family planning to help in educating and changing the attitude of the men towards family planning.

**Keywords:** Attitude, Family planning, Knowledge, Male targeted short message service

## INTRODUCTION

Family planning refers to a deliberate effort which allow people to regulate the number of children and determine healthy spacing and timing of pregnancies.<sup>1</sup> There are a number of benefits attributable to family planning uptake including the reduction in the spread of HIV to newborn babies; reduction of maternal mortality and morbidity; reduction in neonatal, infant and child mortality; reduction recourse to often unsafe abortion as well as improvement in education and employment opportunities for women who are able to delay initiation of childbearing. Sustainable development goal number 3 target 3.7 has prioritized universal access to sexual and reproductive care, family planning and education.<sup>2</sup>

Male spouses' involvement on matters of family planning deserves attention since men can influence their spouses to use or not use any family planning method.<sup>3</sup> Male involvement not only means use of condoms and seeking vasectomy but also encouraging and supporting their spouses in matters of contraception. Male spouses can be involved through providing culturally friendly health education with child spacing messages rather than family planning itself since maybe having a negative attitude towards the contraceptive commodities.<sup>4</sup> Thus, involving men will have a significant role in overall uptake of family planning by increasing their availability, accommodation and acceptability.<sup>5</sup> Additionally, those family planning centers should be made more attractive to male partners.<sup>6</sup> Approximately 190 million women of reproductive age worldwide are not using any family planning method. The global contraceptive prevalence stands at 49.0% with sub-Saharan Africa accounting for the lowest at 29.0%.<sup>7</sup> In Kenya the modern contraceptive prevalence rate stands at 56.9% while in Marsabit County stands at 5.6% with a 37.6% un met need for family planning.<sup>8</sup>

Low uptake of family planning has been associated with high maternal mortality rates across the world. In Kenya, the rate of maternal mortality stands at 342/100,000 which is high than WHO target of 147/100,000 live births.<sup>9</sup> Marsabit County is among the top-five counties with high burden of maternal mortality currently standing at 1,127 per 100,000 live births.<sup>10</sup> Low contraceptive prevalence has also been associated with increased neonatal, infant and child mortality; increased cases of unsafe abortion as well as reduced opportunities for education and employment for women who are unable to delay initiation of childbearing.<sup>11</sup>

One of the reasons given for low contraceptive uptake among women is fear of opposition and lack of support from their partners.<sup>12</sup> Low knowledge levels, social stigma, shyness, embarrassment, and job responsibilities contribute to the low male involvement in family planning.<sup>11</sup> Contraceptive use has been left to be a women affair thus men not being involved thus lacking crucial knowledge thus affecting their attitude towards family

planning.<sup>13</sup> Study from Rwanda showed that inconsistent FP messaging, and lack of male partner involvement were the main factors influencing non-use.<sup>14</sup>

Thus, this study aimed at establishing the influence of male targeted short message service on knowledge, nature of attitude and male involvement on uptake of family planning among spouses in Marsabit county, Kenya.

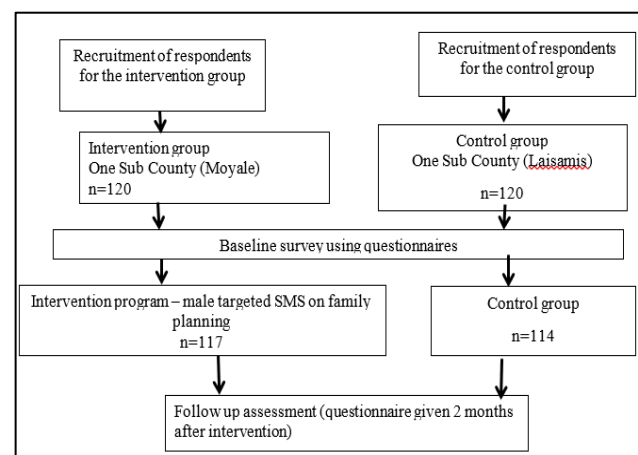
## METHODS

### Design

The study employed a pretest-posttest quasi experimental study design to determine the influence of male targeted SMS intervention on level of knowledge, nature of attitude, male involvement on family planning uptake among couples.

### Intervention

The intervention for this study involved four months male targeted short message service on family planning. The respondents in the intervention group received one message per week for the sixteen weeks from November, 2023 to end of February, 2024. Both the intervention group and the control group were again evaluated two months following the completion of the intervention.



**Figure 1: Study flow chart.**

### Study location

The study was carried out at Marsabit County, located to the northern peak of Kenya, sharing more than 500 km of boarder with Ethiopia to the North and North East, Wajir County to the east, Isiolo County to the south east, Samburu County to the south and south west and Lake Turkana to the west and north west. The county has a population of 459,949 with 243,548 (53%) male and 216,219 (47%) female covering 70,944 sq. km.<sup>15</sup> The county has four sub-counties namely; North Horr, Laisamis, Saku and Moyale. Moyale and Laisamis sub-counties were purposively selected for the study.

### **Study participants**

The study included couples who consented to participate in the baseline and evaluation survey. The couples were permanent residents of the specified sub counties with no plans to relocate within two years. The study also included couples whose female partners were within the reproductive age (15-49 years). Additionally, the male partners should have owned or had access to mobile. However, the study excluded male spouses whose spouse were pregnant during recruitment.

### **Sampling**

Marsabit County was purposively selected since was among the bottom three counties with the lowest modern contraceptive uptake and the highest rate of unmet needs of family planning. Moyale and Laisamis sub counties were purposively chosen since they were far away from each other thus reducing the chances of cross-social interactions and transfer that might lead to knowledge contamination. Butiye and Sololo wards from Moyale and Logologo and Laisamis wards from Laisamis were randomly selected. Kamboe and Merille community health units from Logologo and Laisamis wards in Laisamis sub-county while Butiye and Sololo and Makutano from Butiye and Sololo wards from Moyale sub-county were randomly selected.

The households from the community health units were selected via systematic random sampling using a sample frame consisting of a list of households given by community health promoters. If a household had eligible participants, they were chosen to participate.

### **Sample size determination and distribution**

A formula was applied in calculating the sample size for comparison of two proportions.<sup>16</sup> On calculation the total number of 240 couples were enrolled into for both arms.

### **Research instruments**

Questionnaires were utilized in collection of data. Family planning uptake and male involvement was captured from female spouses while knowledge and nature of attitude was captured from male spouses at both baseline and endline surveys. The pre-test was done at Saku sub-County using a total of 24 (10% of the sample size) of couples.

### **Data management and analysis**

Data was cleaned, entered and managed in the SPSS software version 22.0 for descriptive and inferential analysis. Chi-square/fishers exact tests and logistic

regression analysis was used to determine association and influence of male targeted short message service on knowledge level, nature of attitude and male involvement.<sup>17</sup>

### **Logistical and ethical considerations**

The researcher obtained approval and authorization from Kenyatta University graduate school. Ethical permit was sought from Kenyatta University Ethics and Review Committee. Further research permit to conduct the research were sought from National commission for Science, Technology and innovation. Permission to carry out the study was also sought from Marsabit County and local leadership. Respondents were required to sign a written consent before being interviewed. Privacy and confidentiality of information obtained was assured.

### **Patient and public involvement statement**

The tools were pretested and inputs from the participants were incorporated. The participants were also asked on the preferred language of questionnaire and suggestions on the best time/day to be sent messages. The results were disseminated to the participants by the researcher, community health promoters and the county bulletins.

## **RESULTS**

### ***Influence of short message service on level of knowledge and uptake of family planning***

Table 1 shows the influence of level of knowledge on uptake of family planning. Knowledge was measured by administering the thirty-seven questions on the items of meaning of family planning, eligibility, methods of family planning, common side effects of family planning, benefits, places where services are provided and common side effects. Every correct response was scored mark while every incorrect response was scored zero. The minimum total score was zero while the maximum total score was thirty-seven marks. The knowledge scores were further categorized into high (30-37), moderate (22-29) and low (<22). There was a significant statistical association between male targeted short message and level of knowledge ( $\chi^2=26.526$ ,  $p=0.001$ ). Male targeted short message service increased level of knowledge significantly (OR 4.173,  $p=0.001$ ).

Further results as in Table 2 revealed that there was a significant statistical association between level of knowledge and uptake of family planning in the intervention group ( $\chi^2=6.537$ ,  $p=0.038$ ). Level of knowledge increased uptake of family planning (OR 3.1667,  $p=0.016$ ).

**Table 1: Influence of short message service on level of knowledge.**

Association of short message service on level of knowledge						
Group	Level of knowledge			$\chi^2$	DF	P value
	High (n=52)	Moderate (n=69)	Low (n=101)			
Control (n=108)	15 (28.8%)	25 (36.2%)	68 (67.3%)	26.526	1	p<0.001
Intervention (n=114)	37 (71.2%)	44 (63.8%)	33 (32.7%)			
Influence of short message service on level of knowledge (logistic regression)						
Variable	Category	Odds ratio (OR)	P value	Confidence interval (CI)		
Male targeted SMS	No (reference)	4.173	<0.001	2.378	7.323	
	Yes					

**Table 2: Association and influence of level of knowledge on uptake of family planning.**

Association between level of knowledge and uptake of family planning							
Control group (%)							
Level of knowledge	Uptake of FP (n=22)	Non-ptake of FP (n=86)		$\chi^2$ /Fishers exact	DF	P value	
High (n=15)	3 (13.6)	12(14.0)		0.415	2	P*=0.813	
Moderate (n=25)	4 (18.2)	21(24.4)					
Low (n=68)	15 (68.2)	53(61.6)					
Intervention group (%)							
Level of knowledge	Uptake of FP (n=45)	Non-uptake of FP (n=69)		$\chi^2$	DF	P value	
High (n=37)	19 (42.2)	18 (26.1)		6.537	2	P=0.038	
Moderate (n=44)	11 (24.5)	33 (47.8)					
Low (n=33)	15 (33.3)	18 (26.1)					
Influence of level of knowledge on uptake of family planning							
Variable	Category	Uptake of FP		Odds ratio (OR)	P value	Confidence interval (CI)	
		Uptake	Non-uptake			Lower	Upper
Level of knowledge (intervention)	Low (reference)			3.1667	0.016	1.2385	8.0965
	High	19	18				
	Moderate	11	33				

P\*=Fishers exact.

**Table 3: Influence of short message service on nature of attitude.**

Association of short message service on nature of attitude						
Group	Nature of attitude (%)		$\chi^2$	DF	P value	
	Positive (n=93)	Negative (n=129)				
Control (n=108)	32 (34.4)	76 (58.9)	33.387	1	0.001	
Intervention (n=114)	61 (65.6)	53 (41.1)				
Influence of short message service on nature of attitude (logistic regression) (%)						
Variables	Positive	Negative	Odds ratio (OR)	P value	Confidence interval	
No male targeted SMS (reference)	32 (34.4)	76 (58.9)	2.7335	0.004	1.5720	4.7531
Male targeted SMS	61 (65.6)	53 (41.1)				

**Table 4: Influence of nature of attitude on uptake of family planning.**

Association between nature of attitude and uptake of family planning					
Control group (%)					
Nature of attitude	Uptake of FP (n=22)	Non-uptake of FP (n=86)	$\chi^2$	DF	P value
Negative (n=76)	18 (81.8)	58 (67.4)	1.737	1	P*=0.295
Positive (n=32)	4 (18.2)	28 (32.6)			
Intervention group (%)					
Nature of attitude	Uptake of FP (n=45)	Non-uptake of FP (n=69)	$\chi^2$	DF	P value
Negative (n=53)	21 (46.7)	32 (46.4)	0.001	1	P=1.000
Positive (n=61)	24 (53.3)	37 (53.6)			

P\*=Fishers exact.

### ***Influence of short message service on nature of attitude and uptake of family planning***

Table 3 shows the influence of short message service on nature of attitude towards family planning. A 5-point Likert scale was used to measure nature of attitude on twelve statements. The twelve statements had a minimum score of twelve and maximum score of sixty. The scores were further divided into negative two categories. Total scores of less than average (<36) was dichotomized as negative attitude while those of at least average (>36) was dichotomized as positive attitude. There was a significant statistical association between male targeted short message and nature of attitude ( $\chi^2=33.387$ ,  $p=0.001$ ). Male targeted short message service changed the nature of attitude towards family planning (OR 2.7335,  $p=0.004$ ).

Further results as in Table 4 showed that there was no significant statistical association between nature of attitude and uptake of family planning for both arms.

### ***Influence of short message service on male involvement and uptake of family***

Table 5 shows the influence of short message service on male involvement in family planning matters. Male involvement was assessed by focusing on four aspects including discussing use, financial support, moral support and accompanying spouse to place of uptake. Those who participated in at least two of the four aspects were considered to have been involved while those who participated in less two aspects were considered to have not been involved. There was a significant statistical association between male targeted short message and male involvement ( $\chi^2=27.426$ ,  $p=0.001$ ).

**Table 5: Influence of short message service on male involvement.**

Association of short message service on male involvement						
Group	Male involvement (%)		$\chi^2$	DF	P value	
	Yes (n=128)	No (n=94)				
Control (n=108)	43 (33.6)	65 (69.1)	27.426	1	0.001	
Intervention (n=114)	85 (66.4%)	29 (30.9)				
Influence of short message service on male involvement (logistic regression)						
Variables	Yes (%)	No (%)	Odds ratio (OR)	P value	Confidence interval (CI)	
					Lower	Upper
No male targeted SMS (reference)	43 (33.6)	65 (69.1)	4.4306	<0.001	2.5030	7.8420
Male targeted SMS	85 (66.4)	29 (30.9)				

**Table 6: Association and influence of male involvement on uptake of family.**

Association between male involvement and uptake of family planning							
Control group							
Variables	Category	Uptake of FP (%)		Non-uptake of FP	$\chi^2$	DF	P value
Male involvement (n=108)	Yes	14 (63.6)		29 (33.7%)	6.543	1	0.011
	No	8 (36.4)		57 (66.3%)			
Intervention group							
Male involvement (n=114)	Yes	40 (88.9)		45 (65.2%)	8.046	1	0.005
	No	5 (11.1)		24(34.8%)			
Influence of male involvement on uptake of family planning							
Variables	Category	Uptake of FP		Odds ratio (OR)	P value	Confidence interval (CI)	
		Uptake	Non-uptake				
Male involvement control	No (Reference)	2	68	3.4397	0.013	1.2949	9.1371
	Yes	13	31				
Male involvement intervention	No (Reference)	6	74	4.2667	0.017	1.4879	12.2350
	Yes	12	25				

P\*=Fishers exact.

Table 6 shows association and influence of male involvement on uptake of family. Male targeted short

message service increased male involvement in family planning (OR 4.4306,  $p=0.001$ ).

## DISCUSSION

Results showed that male targeted short message service intervention influenced level knowledge. Increase in knowledge was attributed to the messages that the respondents in the intervention group received on different aspects of family planning. Study agrees with another one which revealed that text messages on family planning helped improve the knowledge.<sup>18,19</sup> Level of knowledge influenced uptake of family planning in the intervention group. This means that respondents who received short messages were more likely to advise their spouses to use family planning since they were more knowledgeable. The findings were consistent with study on determinants of modern contraceptive utilization which revealed that knowledge made people more informed about family planning and thus demand for the services.<sup>20</sup> These findings however contradicted whose study revealed that as much as the knowledge was improved the uptake of family planning still did not change.<sup>21</sup> The difference could be due to this study recruiting male spouses who were believed to be the ones who don't approve their spouses to uptake family planning. Hence involving them directly touched on the main barrier to uptake hence significantly improved uptake.

Male targeted short message service influenced nature of attitude. This means that the SMS intervention helped in changing the attitude of respondents towards family planning. Similar results were reported that the number of those with positive attitude significantly increased after health education intervention.<sup>22</sup> Effective interventions are likely to change attitude towards family planning among male spouses in developing countries.<sup>23</sup>

Male targeted short message service also influenced involvement. This means that male targeted short message service increased male involvement in providing financial support, accompanying spouse to clinics and discussing use family planning. After intervention men become involved in discussing use of family planning with their spouses.<sup>24</sup> Study agrees with another one on implications digital messages intervention on family planning which revealed that upon receipt of messages the number of males who were involved increased.<sup>25</sup> Results also revealed that there was a significant statistical association between male involvement and uptake of family planning. This means that male involvement increased uptake of family planning. This can be attributed to the fact that male involvement makes them knowledgeable on the benefits and thus approving their wife or wives to use the services. These findings were consistent with a study which revealed that male involvement intervention led to men approving family planning and thus increased uptake.<sup>26,27</sup>

The study encountered challenges of inaccessibility of some places due to poor road network in Marsabit County. This necessitated the data collection exercise to take longer and costly than anticipated. In the county also

there was a problem of language barrier which necessitated translation of data collection tools and messages sent to intervention group. The study was also limited to Moyale and Laisamis sub-counties.

## CONCLUSION

The study concluded that male targeted short message service significantly increased knowledge, changed attitude and increased male involvement. The changes were largely in the intervention group where the SMS predicted changes in knowledge (OR=4.173, p=0.001), nature of attitude (OR= 2.73, p=0.004) and male involvement (OR=4.43, p=0.001). The changes in level of knowledge (OR=3.167, p=0.016) and male involvement (OR=4.267, p=0.017) predicted uptake of family planning. However, nature of attitude did not predict uptake of family planning. Thus, there is need to engage community, religious and opinion leaders in family planning to help in advocating, educating and changing the attitude of the men towards family planning and thus become more involved.

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