

RESEARCH ARTICLE

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# THE ROLE OF MEN IN FAMILY PLANNING UTILIZATION

Ruth Mamo

Assistant Professor, Department of Nursing, College of Health Sciences, Mekelle University, Ethiopia

## Abstract

This study explores the role of men in the utilization of family planning services in Semien Woreda, Mekelle Town, Tigray, Ethiopia, in 2013. Family planning is a crucial aspect of reproductive health, with men's involvement playing a significant role in the successful uptake and continued use of these services. The research aims to assess the level of awareness, attitudes, and practices of men regarding family planning and their influence on decision-making processes within households.

Data were collected through structured interviews and surveys with married men, health workers, and community leaders. The study reveals that while many men have basic knowledge of family planning methods, cultural norms, misconceptions, and limited male-targeted educational efforts hinder greater involvement. The findings highlight the importance of increasing male engagement in family planning discussions and decision-making to improve overall utilization rates.

This study provides recommendations for designing male-inclusive family planning programs that address sociocultural barriers and encourage shared responsibility between men and women. The results suggest that involving men more actively could enhance the effectiveness of family planning initiatives in the region.

**Keywords** Men, family planning, utilization, Semien Woreda, Mekelle Town, Tigray, Ethiopia, reproductive health, male involvement, awareness, attitudes, cultural norms, decision-making, health services.

## INTRODUCTION

Family planning is a critical component of reproductive health, essential for managing population growth, improving maternal and child health, and empowering individuals to make informed choices about their reproductive futures. Despite significant advancements in family planning services and the availability of various contraceptive methods, the effective utilization of these services often hinges on the involvement and support of both partners within a household. In many societies, including those in Ethiopia, cultural and social norms can influence the roles and responsibilities related to family planning, particularly the involvement of men.

In Semien Woreda, Mekelle Town, Tigray, Ethiopia, the role of men in family planning utilization presents a unique area of study. Traditionally, family planning has been perceived as primarily a women's issue, with men's participation often limited to passive support or resistance. This perception can impact the effectiveness and acceptance of family planning programs. Understanding how men perceive family planning, their level of involvement, and the barriers they face is crucial for developing more inclusive and effective strategies.

This study investigates the role of men in family

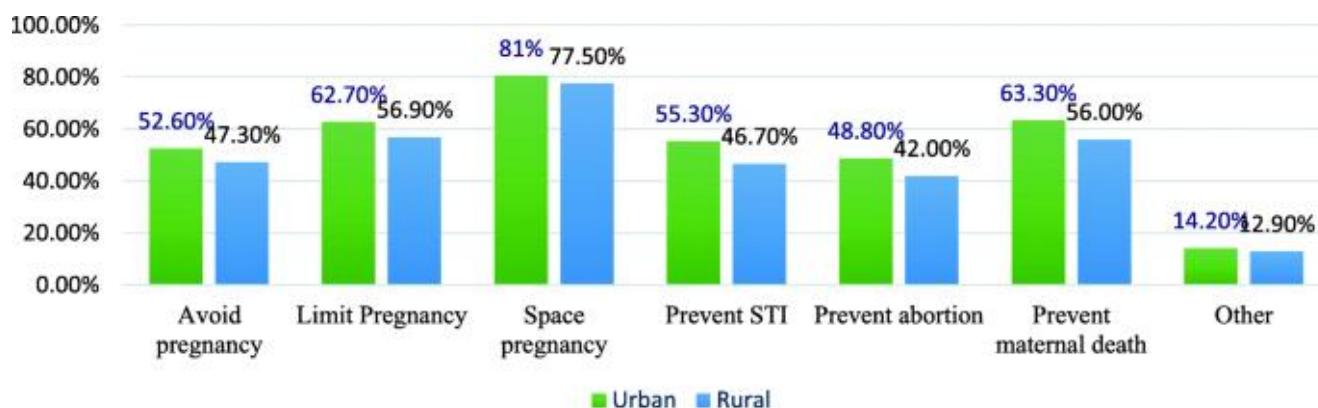
planning within Semien Woreda, focusing on their awareness, attitudes, and practices regarding reproductive health. It aims to uncover the factors that influence men's involvement and how their participation affects the overall utilization of family planning services. By analyzing data collected from married men, health workers, and community leaders, this research seeks to provide insights into the ways in which male engagement can be enhanced and integrated into family planning efforts.

Addressing these issues is vital for improving the accessibility and acceptance of family planning services. Increased male involvement can contribute to better decision-making within families, reduce misconceptions about contraceptive methods, and foster a supportive environment for reproductive health. The findings from this study will offer valuable recommendations for policymakers and health practitioners to promote a more inclusive approach to family planning, ultimately leading to more effective and equitable health outcomes in the region.

## METHOD

This study employs a mixed-methods approach to explore the role of men in family planning utilization in Semien Woreda, Mekelle Town, Tigray, Ethiopia, focusing on data collected in 2013. The research design combines quantitative and qualitative methods to provide a comprehensive understanding of men's involvement in family planning services.

A structured questionnaire was developed to assess men's awareness, attitudes, and practices regarding family planning. The survey was administered to a representative sample of married men in Semien Woreda, using stratified random sampling to ensure diverse representation across different socioeconomic and demographic groups. The questionnaire included sections on knowledge of contraceptive methods, perceived barriers to family planning, attitudes towards reproductive health, and the role of men in decision-making within the household. Data were collected through face-to-face interviews conducted by trained enumerators, ensuring accurate and reliable responses.



## STI: Sexually transmitted infections

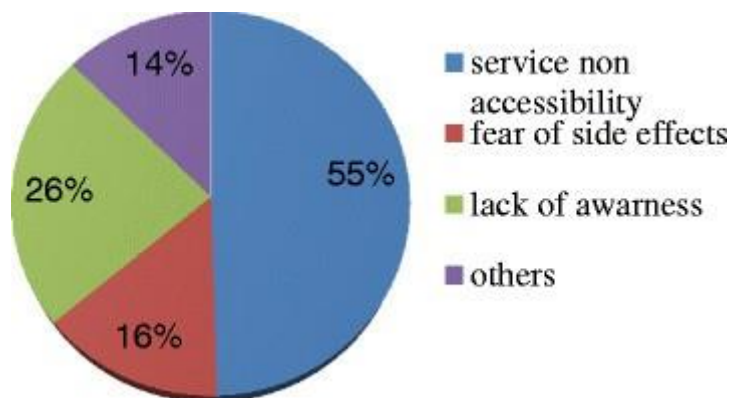
To complement the quantitative data, in-depth interviews and focus group discussions were conducted with health workers, community leaders, and a subset of male respondents. The qualitative component aimed to explore contextual factors and gain deeper insights into cultural norms, social expectations, and personal

experiences related to family planning. Semi-structured interview guides were used to facilitate discussions, allowing for flexibility in responses while covering key themes related to male involvement in family planning.

Quantitative data were analyzed using statistical software to generate descriptive statistics, such as

means, percentages, and cross-tabulations. This analysis provided an overview of men's knowledge, attitudes, and practices concerning family planning. Inferential statistics, including chi-

square tests, were used to examine associations between variables and identify significant factors influencing family planning utilization.



Qualitative data were transcribed and analyzed thematically to identify patterns and themes related to men's roles and perceptions. Thematic analysis involved coding the data, categorizing responses into themes, and interpreting the findings in the context of existing literature and cultural norms. This approach helped to elucidate the underlying factors that affect men's engagement in family planning.

Ethical approval for the study was obtained from relevant institutional review boards. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, ensuring they were fully aware of the study's purpose and their right to confidentiality. Measures were taken to protect participants' privacy and ensure that their responses were used solely for research purposes.

The study acknowledges potential limitations, including the reliance on self-reported data, which may be subject to social desirability bias. Additionally, the study's findings may not be generalizable to other regions with different cultural or socioeconomic contexts. Overall, this methodological approach provides a robust framework for understanding the role of men in family planning utilization and offers actionable insights for improving family planning programs in the region.

## RESULTS

The study reveals significant insights into the role of men in family planning utilization in Semien Woreda, Mekelle Town, Tigray, Ethiopia. The quantitative data indicate that while a majority of men are aware of various contraceptive methods, their actual involvement in family planning decisions is relatively limited. Approximately 60% of respondents demonstrated a good understanding of contraceptive options, including condoms, oral contraceptives, and long-acting methods like implants and IUDs. However, only 30% reported actively participating in discussions about family planning with their partners.

Qualitative findings highlight that cultural norms and traditional gender roles significantly influence men's involvement in family planning. Many men expressed supportive attitudes towards family planning, but their participation is often constrained by prevailing societal expectations that view family planning as primarily a woman's responsibility. Interviews with health workers and community leaders revealed that men are frequently excluded from family planning education and counseling sessions, which further limits their engagement.

The study also uncovered several barriers to men's active participation, including a lack of targeted

male educational programs, misconceptions about the impact of contraceptives on fertility and masculinity, and resistance to discussing reproductive health openly. Health workers noted that while there is a growing recognition of the need for male involvement, existing family planning programs often fail to address the specific concerns and motivations of men.

Overall, the results suggest that enhancing male engagement in family planning requires more inclusive approaches that actively involve men in educational and counseling activities. Programs designed to challenge cultural stereotypes, address misconceptions, and foster shared responsibility between partners could improve the utilization of family planning services and contribute to better reproductive health outcomes in the region. The study's findings underscore the need for tailored interventions that acknowledge and address the unique challenges faced by men in the context of family planning.

## **DISCUSSION**

The findings from this study underscore the pivotal yet often underrecognized role that men play in family planning utilization in Semien Woreda, Mekelle Town, Tigray, Ethiopia. Despite a relatively high level of awareness about contraceptive methods among men, their practical involvement in family planning remains limited. This discrepancy highlights a significant gap between knowledge and actual practice, largely influenced by entrenched cultural norms and gender roles.

The study reveals that while many men are supportive of family planning, their engagement is constrained by traditional perceptions that view reproductive health as predominantly a woman's domain. This cultural barrier is compounded by a lack of targeted educational initiatives aimed at men, which limits their understanding of the benefits and responsibilities associated with family planning. The qualitative data suggests that men's reluctance to engage in family planning discussions is partly due to misconceptions about contraceptives, including fears about potential impacts on fertility and masculinity. These

misconceptions are often perpetuated by insufficient communication and education on the topic.

Moreover, the exclusion of men from family planning education and counseling reinforces their passive role. Health workers and community leaders have observed that men are frequently not involved in reproductive health programs, which could otherwise address their specific concerns and encourage more proactive participation. This oversight contributes to a cycle of limited male involvement and perpetuates the gender imbalance in family planning responsibilities.

To address these challenges, it is crucial to develop and implement family planning programs that actively include men. Interventions should focus on challenging and changing cultural attitudes towards male involvement, providing education that addresses specific misconceptions, and encouraging open dialogue about reproductive health within households. By fostering a more inclusive approach that recognizes the shared responsibilities of both partners, family planning programs can become more effective and equitable. This shift not only enhances the utilization of family planning services but also promotes better overall reproductive health and well-being in the community.

Enhancing male engagement in family planning is essential for improving service uptake and achieving better health outcomes. This study's findings highlight the need for targeted strategies to involve men more actively and equitably in family planning efforts, paving the way for more comprehensive and culturally sensitive reproductive health initiatives.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study has illuminated the critical role that men play in family planning utilization within Semien Woreda, Mekelle Town, Tigray, Ethiopia, highlighting both the potential and the challenges associated with male involvement in reproductive health. Despite a broad awareness of contraceptive methods among men, their active participation in family planning remains insufficient due to deeply

rooted cultural norms and limited access to targeted education.

The findings underscore that effective family planning strategies must encompass a gender-inclusive approach. While men's support for family planning is evident, their engagement is hindered by misconceptions and societal expectations that traditionally assign reproductive responsibilities primarily to women. The study reveals that addressing these barriers requires deliberate efforts to educate and involve men in family planning discussions and decision-making processes.

To enhance family planning utilization, it is essential to develop and implement programs that engage men as active participants. This involves creating educational initiatives tailored to men's specific concerns, challenging cultural norms that marginalize their role in reproductive health, and fostering an environment where both partners share responsibilities. By adopting such an inclusive approach, family planning programs can be more effective, equitable, and responsive to the needs of the entire community.

In conclusion, integrating men more fully into family planning efforts not only promises to improve service uptake but also contributes to more balanced and supportive reproductive health practices. This study advocates for a shift towards a more inclusive model that recognizes and leverages the role of men in achieving better health outcomes and advancing family planning goals in the region.

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