

Health System and Nursing Strategies for Enhancing Male Participation in Family Planning: Evidence from Tema General Hospital, Ghana.

Kate Arku Korsah.

Toronto Metropolitan University, Toronto, Canada.

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the role of the health system, particularly nursing interventions, in enhancing male participation in family planning (FP) at Tema General Hospital (TGH), Ghana. Male engagement in Family Planning remains limited despite increased awareness and service availability. A descriptive cross-sectional study was conducted involving 100 male community members and 10 Family Planning staff. Data was collected through structured questionnaires, interviews, and service records from 2015 to 2017. Results showed that while awareness levels were high (95%), only 21% of men had ever visited a Family Planning clinic. Nursing interventions such as health education, couple counseling, and prioritization of men during service delivery improved participation but were constrained by resource limitations, staff shortages, and cultural attitudes. The study underscores the importance of integrating male-focused strategies into Family Planning programs and strengthening nursing capacity for gender-inclusive reproductive health services.

Keywords: male participation, nursing interventions, family planning, Ghana, health system.

INTRODUCTION

Family planning (FP) is a cornerstone of public health and sustainable development, contributing to reduced maternal mortality, improved child health, and economic stability (World Health Organization [WHO], 2019). Despite its proven benefits, male participation in Family Planning programs across Sub-Saharan Africa remains low (Vouking et al., 2014). In Ghana, Family Planning programs traditionally target women, often excluding men from education, counseling, and decision-making processes (Ghana Statistical Service [GSS], 2022).

Nurses play a pivotal role in Family Planning service delivery, as they are often the first point of contact for clients. Their attitudes, counseling approaches, and engagement methods significantly influence male involvement (Adongo et al., 2006). However, institutional barriers such as inadequate staffing, lack of male-friendly facilities, and cultural perceptions that Family Planning is a woman's responsibility continue to impede progress (Ezeh et al., 2020).

This study assesses the role of nursing and health care system strategies in promoting male Family Planning participation at Tema General Hospital. It identifies both effective practices and systemic challenges, offering recommendations for strengthening male-inclusive reproductive health interventions.

METHODS

Study Design and Setting

A descriptive cross-sectional design was adopted. The study was conducted at Tema General Hospital (TGH), a major referral facility in the Greater Accra Region. The Family Planning unit at TGH provides a range of contraceptive services, health education, and counseling.

Study Population and Sampling

Participants included 100 male community members and 10 Family Planning unit staff (comprising nurses, midwives, and health educators). Convenience sampling was used to select participants who were available during the study period.

Data Collection

Data collection instruments included structured questionnaires for men, interview guides for staff, and service records from 2015–2017. The questionnaires explored awareness, participation, and perceptions of Family Planning service quality. Staff interviews focused on strategies used to engage men and the challenges encountered.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS version 2.0 and presented as frequencies and percentages. Qualitative data were analyzed thematically and integrated into the discussion.

Ethical Considerations

Approval was obtained from the Committee on Human Research, Publication, and Ethics (CHRPE). Written informed consent was obtained from participants. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained.

RESULTS

Male Awareness and Participation

Out of 100 men surveyed, 95% had heard about Family Planning, but only 21% had visited a Family Planning clinic. Among those who attended, 47.6% did so with their wives. The majority cited time constraints, shyness, and limited male contraceptive options as reasons for non-participation.

Table 1: Male Awareness and Participation in Family Planning

Variable	Frequency (n=100)	Percentage (%)
Heard about FP	95	95
Ever visited FP clinic	21	21
Attended with partner	10	47.6
Believe FP benefits men	82	82

Nursing and Health System Strategies

Nursing interventions identified included health education sessions, couple-based counseling, and prioritization of male clients during service hours. Staff reported using peer advocacy, health talks at workplaces, and follow-up phone calls to sustain male engagement.

Table 2: Key Nursing Strategies Used to Engage Men in Family Planning

Strategy	Frequency Reported (n=10)	Percentage (%)
Health talks during clinic sessions	10	100
Couple counseling	8	80
Male prioritization during visits	6	60
Workplace FP education	5	50
Follow-up via phone	4	40

Institutional Challenges

Nurses highlighted several challenges: inadequate staff (70%), lack of male-focused Family Planning options (60%), cultural resistance (50%), and poor funding (40%). The absence of male role models among Family Planning staff further limited outreach.

Figure 1: Institutional Challenges Affecting Male Family Planning Involvement (Adapted from staff interviews showing constraints in manpower, resources, and cultural acceptance.)

Trends in Male Family Planning Attendance

Clinic records showed gradual increases in male attendance—596 in 2015, 660 in 2016, and 695 in 2017. Staff attributed this rise to enhanced counseling and education efforts led by nursing personnel.

Table 3: Male Attendance at Family Planning Clinics, 2015–2017

Year	Male Attendance
2015	596
2016	660
2017	695

DISCUSSION

Role of Nursing in Male FP Engagement

The study confirms that nurses are central to improving male Family Planning participation. Through counseling and targeted education, nurses foster trust and dispel myths. Similar findings in Uganda and Kenya emphasize the impact of nursing-led Family Planning interventions (Kabagenyi et al., 2014; Lasee & Becker, 2018).

Couple counseling was particularly effective in Tema General Hospital, as it encouraged joint decision-making and mutual understanding. Men who attended family planning clinic with their partners were more likely to return for follow-up visits. This aligns with WHO (2019) recommendations for couple-centered reproductive health care.

Institutional and Systemic Barriers

The study identified systemic challenges that limit effective nursing care in Family Planning, including understaffing, limited training on male-focused Family Planning, and inadequate educational materials. Family Planning units often lack privacy for male clients, reinforcing the perception that Family Planning services exclusively cater for women. Health system reforms are needed to address these structural gaps.

Cultural Influences

Cultural expectations remain a strong determinant of male family Planning involvement. Many men in Tema perceive Family Planning as a woman's domain, and male engagement may be viewed as a weakness or submission. Nurses, as community educators, can play a vital role in reshaping these narratives by involving community and religious leaders in outreach.

Policy Implications

Findings highlight the need for national Family Planning policies to explicitly include male participation indicators. The Ghana Health Service should strengthen gender-sensitive training for nurses and expand Family Planning programs to include vasectomy and condom promotion campaigns targeting men.

CONCLUSION

Nursing and health system strategies have a significant impact on promoting male Family Planning participation in Ghana. The commitment of nurses at Tema General Hospital to deliver inclusive services have contributed to a gradual increase in male attendance. However, persistent cultural, institutional, and resource challenges continue to limit progress. Strengthening nursing capacity, expanding Family Planning options for men, and promoting culturally sensitive education are essential for sustainable change.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Capacity Building:** Train nurses and midwives on gender-sensitive Family Planning counseling and male engagement techniques.
2. **Male-Friendly Services:** Establish separate consultation spaces or dedicated service hours for men at Family Planning clinics.
3. **Policy Integration:** Include male involvement metrics in Ghana's reproductive health monitoring and evaluation systems.
4. **Community Collaboration:** Engage male champions and religious leaders to promote positive Family Planning narratives.
5. **Resource Mobilization:** Allocate budgetary support for outreach, logistics, and Family Planning education targeting men.

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