Men Matter:
Engaging men in India's reproductive health goals
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Family Planning Division
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Government of India

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Men Matter: Engaging men in India's reproductive health goals
Why Men Matter?

Of the 1.5 billion women of reproductive age in developing countries, 867 million have a need for modern contraceptives. Of that total, 645 million women rely on modern contraceptives and have access to them. But a staggering 222 million still do not¹. This is reprehensible!

When it comes to family planning and reproductive health, women globally encounter challenges related to access and quality of services that prevent them from exercising their reproductive rights.

The Government of India recognizes gender inequality and gender-related barriers as key determinants of reproductive health; and therefore promotes gender equality in all areas of programming.

Men Matter recognizes reproduction as a dual commitment, and not solely a woman’s responsibility⁶. This photobook is a compilation of eleven human stories from the field, documented across four geographically and culturally varied states in India – Assam, Madhya Pradesh, Telangana and Uttar Pradesh. These stories highlight the varied shades of constructive male engagement, with men in their overlapping roles – as allies, as beneficiaries, as gatekeepers of their families, as initiators of change and propellers of progress, going beyond reproductive health to a broader development agenda.

While these stories take us through the lives of the champions of male engagement in family planning, the harsh reality remains that in India the prevalence of vasectomy continues to be extremely low at 1% compared to prevalence of female sterilization, which is 34%³.

The need of the hour, therefore, is to invest in men early, starting with the young adolescents, a strong force of 243 million in India⁴. Opening out channels for sharing and learning for adolescents, including boys experiencing a time of transition will ensure these young people make a successful journey through this critical period. The right investments will ensure the young people finish school; start a productive working life; become responsible citizens; develop healthy relationships and delay childbearing and make decisions together about the timing and spacing of pregnancies and the number of children they have⁵.

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2- Notably, the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo and later, the 1995 Fourth World Conference on women in Beijing.
3- NFHS III
4- Unicef, State of the world’s children: Adolescents an age of opportunity; 2011.
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Sunita’s dream of becoming a teacher was put on hold after the unplanned birth of her two children. She was however the lucky one – her husband came to her rescue.

Men as propellers of progress
Sunita’s dream of becoming a teacher was put on hold after the unplanned birth of her two children. She was however the lucky one – her husband came to her rescue.

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Overcoming one of the most common myths associated with NSV, a bus driver, despite resistance from his family, opts for NSV.

Men as gatekeepers of their families
A father takes a stand to avert the marriage of his underage daughter.
It is crucial to communicate the importance of family planning to men. Contraception is central to larger development agendas, but this view needs to be more widely recognized and accepted.*
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*Population Council; Family Planning: Increasing Access, Engaging Communities, Improving Technologies
Men As Allies

A positive husband-wife relationship enhances a woman's decision-making regarding matters that affect her and her family's life.
A positive husband-wife relationship enhances a woman's decision-making regarding matters that affect her and her family's life.
Story 1

Mangesh Patil
Dindori District, Madhya Pradesh

Life for Savita Patil, the ASHA supervisor in Dindori district’s Shobhapur village, has not been easy. As a community health volunteer, she has found working in a tribal district to be extremely arduous, given the presence of deep-rooted chasms that come in the way of the community adopting safe reproductive health practices.

60 percent of Dindori district’s population (of over 7 lakh people) is tribal and predominantly rural.¹

Even during her early years as an ASHA worker, Savita could see the linkages between lack of acceptance of family planning methods and the increasing number of maternal and infant mortality cases in her village.

“There were little or no takers for family planning”. Savita took it upon herself to sensitize and educate the community on the significance of the same but found it extremely onerous to reach a large proportion of the village comprising mostly of men and young adolescent boys.

Source

¹ - http://dindori.nic.in/

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It was then that Savita’s husband, Mangesh Patil decided to come forward as the first man in the village to opt for NSV. “I told my wife (that) if my undergoing the procedure would facilitate and encourage more men to opt for the same, I would happily take the first step”– says Mangesh Patil.

Little did Mangesh know how his decision would change the trajectory of men’s engagement in family planning in Shobhapur village. Soon after his procedure, five men from his village opted for NSV that very year. And this was only the beginning. Today, with the concerted efforts of Savita and her husband, one can find an NSV beneficiary in every third household, and almost all couples in this village use at least one method of family planning.
Photo: G. Ramesh and Radhika from Uttapally village, Karimnagar district, Telangana lead a happy life after opting for a permanent method of sterilization after the birth of their daughter.

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“Today, India has the largest cohort of adolescents in the world—more than 243 million. It’s critical that we work with both boys and girls to incorporate equitable gender and social roles. We need to help navigate their transition from childhood to adulthood safely. The impact of this would not only be transformative, but also intergenerational.”
“Today, India has the largest cohort of adolescents in the world—more than 243 million. It’s critical that we work with both boys and girls to incorporate equitable gender and social roles. We need to help navigate their transition from childhood to adulthood safely. The impact of this would not only be transformative, but also intergenerational.”

Dr. Bulbul Sood
Country Director
Jhpiego India - an affiliate of Johns Hopkins University
Men as Torchbearers of Transformation

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“Leaders become great, not because of their power, but because of their ability to empower others.”

John Maxwell
From an early age, Deepak had the urge to question the age old norms and traditions that restrict the participation and decision making of women. He knew he needed to become “someone important” in order to be able to question and eventually contest these.

Years later, Deepak seized the opportunity and contested for the Panchayat elections for the position of Sarpanch (village headman) in 2005. Being a popular member of his community, often being the first to come up with solutions, it was only natural for Deepak to win. He served as the village Sarpanch from 2005-2010.

Photo:
Deepak Bhagat, a role model, and a mentor for the members of his community—stands with pride outside the Balaghat district hospital.
“As a Sarpanch, I came face to face with the realities of maternal and child health in my district. I also witnessed how we as a society place the responsibility of family planning solely on women. This, I realized, was against the right to equality – of choice, of voicing one’s opinion and of decision making”, says Deepak.

Today Deepak Bhagat is known not just as a village headman, but also a role model. In 2006, while serving as the Sarpanch, Deepak was the first person in the village to opt for NSV. His decision later inspired more men to opt for family planning methods.

Deepak’s dynamism and engagement with the community won him the position of the Sarpanch for the second term in 2014.

“I hold monthly meetings with the ANMs, ASHAs and counselors. The service providers are in constant touch with the youth, the newly married couples and those expecting children. We encourage them to opt from among the wide range of family planning options made available by the Government of India.”

It is because of the dedication and efforts of leaders like Deepak Bhagat that Balaghat today is known as a champion district for the uptake of NSV.

In 2014-15, close to 600 people from Balaghat alone opted for the procedure.¹

Source
1 - HMIS 2014-15

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“The moment a child is born, the mother is also born. She never existed before. The woman existed, but the mother, never. A mother is something absolutely new.”
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OSHO
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Men from Skeptics to Advocates
Men's support can make a woman's world better. In a patriarchal society like India, to improve the state of women's health, men must share the responsibility to break the social barriers that prevent the realization of becoming a healthy mother and healthy women.
Rehman Ali
Sivasagar District, Assam

Plucking tea in the lush gardens — in a state that contributes to more than 51 per cent of the country’s tea production—with cane baskets hanging on their backs, Assam’s tea tribe women make for a convivial landscape. And yet, the lives these women live are paradoxical to their cheerful demeanor.

Sanjeera Begum, a tea garden worker at the Mycepora tea garden estate was married at 13 to Rehman Ali, who was 17-years old at that time. Married for 10 years, the couple has two sons-- aged 6 and 8.

Sanjeera dropped out of school after class four and remembers having to pick up a pen only to sign papers for her daily wage. Maried early, underweight and undernourished, Sanjeera battled through a difficult first pregnancy.

Alcoholism among men is yet another problem in this area. Rehman Ali had picked up this unfortunate habit turning him to an aggressive unsupportive husband that Sanjeera never thought he would become. Rehman's unwillingness to opt for a family planning method led to the birth of their second child under circumstances where they did not even have enough to feed the family.
It was then that Sanjeera sought support from the women part of the Mother’s Club in the estate. Interventions such as Mothers’ Clubs have been instrumental in spreading awareness against alcoholism and child marriage, and promoting good health practices, by holding monthly meetings in the tea garden areas of Assam. Rehman Ali was convinced into attending a few of these meetings.

Over a period of time, he managed to overcome his alcohol addiction, and with the support and motivation of his wife, the ASHA worker and the women from the Mothers’ club, he opted for non-scalpel vasectomy (NSV) in 2007.

For Rehman Ali, this was a life altering decision, “I knew I had to do be more responsible, but I couldn’t have done it without the support of my wife.”

In Mycepora tea estate, most families have opted for some family planning method. In Sivasagar closed to 800 men opted for NSV in the year 2014-2015.¹

¹ - HMIS 2014-15

Source
In Dindori district, Madhya Pradesh, a father holds the hand of his one year old envisioning a promising future for his baby.

Despite cultural norms about men’s sexual behavior, many men are in fact willing and able to participate more fully in women’s sexual and reproductive health if given a ‘comfort zone’ and opportunity to do so. That is, the main issue preventing men from assuming more responsibility for their and their partner’s sexual and reproductive health may not be mainly cultural or personal, but rather the lack of an encouraging and enabling environment.
“Despite cultural norms about men’s sexual behavior, many men are in fact willing and able to participate more fully in women’s sexual and reproductive health if given a ‘comfort zone’ and opportunity to do so. That is, the main issue preventing men from assuming more responsibility for their and their partner’s sexual and reproductive health may not be mainly cultural or personal, but rather the lack of an encouraging and enabling environment”.

McDonald L. Jones
“Promoting male involvement in family planning in Vietnam and India”
Men as a Collective

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Coming together is a beginning, staying together is progress and working together is success.
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Teamwork, a common vision, and a positive attitude are traits both B. Venkanna and R. Rajaya firmly believe in. Living among the tribal community of Mulugu Mandal in Warangal district, they both understand the complexities of working in a community dependent on daily wage and therefore its preference for multiple children to support their work comes naturally to them.

As Family Health Assistants (FHA) working in the remote regions of Warangal district in Telangana, both have been working as a team in sensitizing young men and adolescent boys on their reproductive rights and duties towards their families and themselves.

“We realized men transition from an atmosphere where they take no decisions (prior to their marriage) to a family post marriage where all decisions rest upon them. They are just not prepared for it”, says M. Rajaya who has been working as an FHA for over a decade.

His friend and fellow companion, Venkanna cannot agree more, “We have been speaking to the older adolescents and marriageable men on the benefits of family planning for young couples.”

Through house-to-house visits, they travel as a team sensitizing the men on spacing their children and on the various options available for the same by the Government of India.

Agreeing that motivating people is not easy, and requires skill, they go on to add “We speak to them like their friends, like their family members, it takes time but when we see healthy happy families, the effort seems worth it all.”
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“Right from the time a girl is born to the time she gives birth, spaces for her participation in decisions related to her body, health and well-being need to be created – Men play a crucial role in this. It is only then that we can address the overall maternal child health agenda. To empower the women, we need to start by sensitizing the men.”
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Chhavi Bharadwaj
IAS, Collector and District Magistrate
Dindori District
Madhya Pradesh

Photo:
Nineteen year old Geeta from Jorhat district, Assam is delighted after the birth her first child, a girl. Soon after her delivery Geeta opted for ICUD that will help her carefully plan her second child.
Men's Role in Maternity Care

Involving men in the maternity care of their pregnant partners is crucial as their behavior can significantly affect the health outcomes of women and their babies.
Involving men in maternity care of their pregnant partners is crucial as their behavior can significantly affect the health outcomes of women and their babies.
In developing countries, it is usually the men in the families who hold the social and economic power and have tremendous control over their partners. When it comes to antenatal care, a husband at an antenatal clinic is a rare sight in many communities and it is not very common to find men accompanying their partners during ANC and delivery.

But thankfully, there are men like Pancham Meshram who break these stereotypes.

28-year-old Pancham and his wife Mangejari, aged 23, have been married for four years. They have a three-year-old son and are expecting their second child soon.

After the birth of their first daughter, and post being counseled by the ASHA worker, the couple opted for oral contraceptive pills (OCP), to ensure that they could space and time the birth of their second child.

The Government of India, under the Family Planning scheme of Ensuring Spacing at Birth (ESB), seeks to delay the birth of the first child (to two years after marriage), promote healthy spacing between children (of three years) and appreciate the importance of a small family.
Besides being supportive to the idea of healthy spacing between children, Pancham, a barber by profession, ensured that he accompanied his wife for all her antenatal check-ups. "It is my prime responsibility as her husband to be present for ANC counseling with my wife. Husbands are not just bystanders. There is a need to take advantage of our presence", says Pancham.

Men like Pancham challenge the age-old practices wherein young married women are at the bottom of household hierarchies. "It is unfortunate that pregnant women are expected to keep quiet, work hard and eat little. I believe women should have an equal say in family decisions", says Pancham who is keen on having a beautiful baby girl after the first being a boy.

A third of women of reproductive age in India are undernourished, with a body mass index (BMI) of less than 18.5 kg/m². It is well known that an undernourished mother inevitably gives birth to an undernourished baby, perpetuating an intergenerational cycle of undernutrition.

Source
1 - UNICEF website;
http://unicef.in/whatwedo/6/women/nutrition

Photo:
A lady in waiting for her antenatal check-up at district hospital, Balaghat, Madhya Pradesh
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Many men desire greater involvement in reproductive health, provided they receive information and the opportunity to form positive attitudes.
Story 6

Pavan Kumar

Gonda District, Uttar Pradesh

Pavan Kumar lives with his wife Shashi and their two children — a 10-year-old girl and a 9-year-old boy — in Uttar Pradesh’s Gonda District. Gonda is a high-priority district for health interventions. Pavan, 32, recently opted for NSV, a service the population of the district can greatly benefit from.

To help address the state’s high infant and maternal mortality, the Government of India, through ASHAs, has been trying to motivate the community to opt for spacing and limiting methods of family planning.

“Male sterilization or NSV has not been the preferred method in the district. For years, sterilization has been known only as a woman’s business. Other factors responsible for less preference of NSV [in the district] include the fear of developing physical weakness or becoming less manly (kam-mardana),” says Manju Mishra, the Block Health Worker for Gonda.

“I have been working with the ASHAs and trying to break this myth by reaching out to the community and ensuring that family planning gets discussed among other agendas of the village.”

Photo:
Pavan Kumar with his family

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Manju says, “The Government’s efforts have proven to be a motivating factor in boosting their morale. Jyoti, the ASHA who motivated Pavan to opt for NSV [also present during the discussion], has received an honorarium for motivating a few other families this year.”

When asked about his health since undergoing the NSV procedure, including any weakness or side effects, Pavan said that there were none: “The entire procedure hardly took 10 minutes—no stitches—and I could get back to work the very next day. In fact, I was also given compensation by the government for the expense I had to incur in commuting to and from the health facility.”

Pavan’s 27-year-old wife Shashi has been extremely pleased that her husband took the lead in planning their family, prioritising her and their children’s health. “To watch Shashi smile makes me feel I have done something right,” says Pavan as he poses for a family picture.

In a district which reported zero NSVs last year,1 Pavan is a catalyst of change.

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Photo:
Manju Mishra, Block Health Worker Ghiloli, Gonda District (Uttar Pradesh), has been working with ASHAs to break the myths and misconceptions related to male sterilization.

Source ———
HMIS 2013-14

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Men as Proactive Counselors

Good client-provider interaction, especially counseling, is one of the primary factors that support voluntary decision-making and informed reproductive choice.
Good client-provider interaction, especially counseling, is one of the primary factors that support voluntary decision-making and informed reproductive choice.
It is a busy morning at the maternity ward of District Hospital, Balaghat when Arvind Kumar enters for his daily rounds. New mothers, exhausted from going through childbirth lie in beds surrounded by their family members happily caring for them.

Arvind, the RMNCH+A Counselor, attends to each, enquiring about their health and the health of their newborns. His comfort and rapport with the mothers and their families is remarkable!

In an environment where having women counsel women for health (including family planning) is a norm; Arvind breaks the stereotype with ease.

Having been associated with the Government of India’s family planning program for more than 30 years, he was appointed as an RMNCH+A Counselor in 2012, part of a cadre created by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare to provide comprehensive counseling on maternal and newborn health including family planning.

Photos:
In Balaghat, also known as one of the most backward district in India, 3 RMNCH+A counselors are efficiently connecting clients to care - Arvind being one of them.
As a male counselor, Arvind has successfully dealt with the apprehensions of the community wherein discussing family planning and reproductive issues are considered “private matters”, between couples or with a female provider.

Arvind has been counseling couples on all the family planning options available under the Government of India’s Family Planning program – for both spacing and limiting. “I leave the decisions to the couple. It is they who decide what is best for them – we only support, we enable.”

It comes as no surprise that Arvind has counseled over 7000 couples in family planning and maternal child health (since 2006).

It is because of counselors like Arvind, that men in Balaghat district have become more receptive to the idea of adopting FP methods. When it comes to NSV, Balaghat is a champion district in Madhya Pradesh with close to 600 men from the community opting for the same.¹

Source
1 - HMIS 2014-15

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Our dedicated team of counselors, surgeons, staff nurses, families as propagators of informed choice

Photo: Staff nurses at the maternity ward, District Hospital Karimnagar, Telangna.

An RMNCH+A counselor in district hospital, Dindori, Madhya Pradesh, educates a new mother on the family planning options available.

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and community health providers have been reaching out to
and decision making up to the last mile.

Photo: Dr. Nirmal Chutia, a champion NSV surgeon from Sivasagar district, Assam, has been motivating men from the tea garden communities living in and around the district to opt for the procedure.

Photo: Sarita Rajkumar from Warangal district, Telangna, shares a few moments of joy with her ASHA worker Meena, who was instrumental in motivating Sarita’s husband to opt for NSV.
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Participation of men in reproductive health issues leads to a better understanding between husband and wife.
Most men do not consider male sterilization, commonly known as ‘purush nasbandi’ to be a best option for family planning. Despite being a safe procedure, it is common to see men take a backseat primarily due to the myths and misconceptions associated with it.

J. Ravindra, a father of two children was one of the critics of NSV. A bus driver by profession, for the longest time, Ravindra believed NSV would affect his everyday work. “I was worried I wouldn’t be able to drive the bus after getting the procedure done. Most men here are of the opinion that after getting NSV done it is difficult to ride a bicycle or drive.”

A. Shanthi, Ravindra’s mother seconded his views regarding NSV. “He is my only son, I was hoping for another grandchild”, says Shanthi in a gloomy tone.

Ravindra’s wife was quick to take the lead. To ensure their family does not grow beyond the desired size, she made him speak to the ASHA worker in the village, who patiently heard him out and was able to resolve all his apprehensions regarding NSV.

“The ASHA worker helped to dispel the myths associated with NSV and told me the only way we can progress as a healthy community is by ensuring the health of our families, especially women. So I went ahead with the procedure”, says Ravindra.
Pointing at his tractor Ravindra says, “Not only do I drive a bus, I also have a tractor here to work in my small piece of farm. If anything that has happened after the surgery is that my family’s life has become much happier.”

Ravindra’s mother was however was not happy with his decision, “My mother is still upset, but someday she’ll understand. The change needs to start from somewhere – why not us men as partners, as companions!” says Ravindra.

Karimnagar, a champion district for the uptake of NSV saw over 2800 men from the community opt for the same. (HMIS 2014-15)
"There are 580 million adolescent girls in the world. Four out of five of them live in developing countries. Investing in them today will unleash their full potential to share humanity's future."
“There are 580 million adolescent girls in the world. Four out of five of them live in developing countries. Investing in them today will unleash their full potential to share humanity’s future.”

Dr. Babatunde Osotimehin
United Nations Under - Secretary - General and Executive Director, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)

Motherhood in childhood: Facing the challenge of adolescent pregnancy; UNFPA 2013
Men as Gatekeepers of their Families

No girl should be robbed of her adolescence, her education, her health, and her aspirations.
No girl should be robbed of her adolescence, her education, her health, and her aspirations.
Tucked in the bi-lanes of Baghreli village in Dindori district (Madhya Pradesh), we find a small grocery shop run by P.R. Rajak. Dindori is one of the most economically backward regions in the state comprising of 97% rural and tribal population.

Rajak is a father of three daughters aged 17 years, 15 years and 13 years. Being the only son in his family, Rajak was forced to shoulder responsibilities from an early age.

“We barely make ends meet. The income from the shop is all we have to survive,” says Rajak.

In a society where daughters are considered a burden, Rajak’s relatives put pressure on him to marry off his eldest daughter Garima when she was 16—thinking that would ease some of his pressure.

“At first I pondered over the thought, even gave them [the groom’s family] my word, but I looked at my wife and thought to myself – I was going to thrust the cycle of early marriage and early pregnancy upon my daughter.”

Child marriage continues to be a fairly widespread social evil in the state. As per DLHS-3, 29.3% girls below 18 were married. The findings further revealed that more than 10% of women aged 15-19 were already mothers or pregnant in 40 districts of Madhya Pradesh at the time of survey.
Dindori is among the districts with moderate prevalence of marriages below the legal age. However, the equity lens shows a much disturbing fact as early marriage among women is high, especially among SC/ST subgroups. (Source: Knowledge Hub: Getting Evidence into Policy and Practice)

Rajak did not give in to financial and societal pressures. He decided not to marry off Garima at such a tender age.

Not only did Rajak prevent his daughters from marrying early, to save the hassle of everyday travel from the school and back (situated 13 kilometers away), and ensuring his daughters focus on their education, Rajak rented a room next to the school.

“I save up whatever best I can. It is a small amount [to pay] for the aspirations they have,” says Rajak.

Garima’s eyes gleam with joy and pride for her father as she shares her ambition, “I want to become a banker, it fascinates me a lot.”

“She will be a very tough banker, an authoritative one”, says Rajak as they both break into a hearty laugh.”

Photo:
A group of adolescent girls at the Mycepora tea estate in Sivasagar district, Assam.
We want men to participate in the whole process of care, this includes their care prior to, during and post delivery. A husband’s role and participation during the antenatal checkup during his wife’s pregnancy is crucial to ensure this cycle of care is guaranteed post delivery as well.
“We want men to participate in the whole process of care, this includes their care prior to, during and post delivery. A husband’s role and participation during the antenatal checkup during his wife’s pregnancy is crucial to ensure this cycle of care is guaranteed post delivery as well.”

Dr. Budhaprakash M. Jyoti

Photo:
Bhajanlal Gummanse with his baby outside his residence in Dhindori district Madhya Pradesh
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The more we are able to engage men as responsible partners, the more progress we can make.
The more we are able to engage men as responsible partners, the more progress we can make.
Among the happy faces that grab attention is that of P. Rajakumar and his wife Sarita. A talkative couple, both giggle their way through words sharing how their’s was a love marriage.

The couple, married in 2013 is blessed with two children—one and half year old son and a daughter just a little over a month old.

Sarita comes across as a sharp young lady. Having recently completed her Bachelor’s in Education (B.Ed.) she aspires to become a teacher. Her aspirations however had to be put on hold due to the closely spaced unplanned birth of her two children.
Sarita was hopeful of taking up a job soon, but got pregnant with her second child.

"I was just not prepared for the second one" says Sarita while pointing at ‘Cherry’, her one-month-old daughter.

Rajkumar takes the onus for this - “I should have opted for a family planning method. We could have planned and spaced our children at a time convenient to both of us.”

To ensure this did not happen again, Rajakumar opted for non-scalpel vasectomy (NSV) in January 2016. “My neighbor told me getting NSV done is like gifting a new life to your partner.”

Sarita agrees with what the neighbor had to say. “My husband’s decision to get NSV done has reignited my ambition to work. I just need to wait for Cherry to be a little older. I will take up a job thereafter,” says Sarita who cannot stop being thankful to her husband for taking this progressive stand.

In January 2016, 53 people from Gunturpalli village got NSV done. In Warangal over 1000 men from the community took a collective stand and opted for the procedure in the year 2014-15.¹ This collective stand is remarkable!

Source
1 - HMIS 2014-15

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Men as Supportive Partners
Reaching out to men, as well as women, sometimes apart, sometimes together, but always in relation to each other.
“Everyday someone or the other has to compromise over their share of meal”, says Santoshi Malakar, homemaker and mother of a year old daughter.

Santoshi and her husband Bablu reside in Arjun Guri village in Sivasagar district, Assam, among families surviving on a daily wage of Rupees 100-150 as their main and sometimes only source of income.

At 4 feet 9 inches, 24-year old Santoshi weighed a mere 32 kgs. leading to a difficult first pregnancy, putting her and her child’s life at risk. In Assam, the incidence of anemia has been found among 72 percent of pregnant women within the age group of 15-49 years¹. As per the SRS (July 2011), the Maternal Mortality Ratio (MMR) in Assam (2007-09) is 390 per 100,000 live births - the highest in the country.

The doctors knew, given Santoshi’s weight and health, her recovery post her first child would be slow. She was counseled for a postpartum family planning method (like the IUCD) immediately after her delivery.

“The doctor told us IUCD was a viable option. It will give her body time to heal”, says Bablu.

¹ - NFHS III

Source —
1 - NFHS III
Santoshi’s in-laws however thought otherwise. They were hopeful for another child – this time a boy.

Bablu however, was quick to come to her rescue. With his support Santoshi opted for IUCD soon after the birth of their daughter Kumkum.

“I believe I am the guardian of her well-being. It is my responsibility to ensure she’s healthy and happy,” smiles Bablu.

On the surface none of this may seem remarkable, but as part of communities where men and women rarely communicate over reproductive issues and where most decisions rest solely in the hands of men in the family, Bablu’s support and dedication is extraordinary!

Their daughter Kumkum is the apple of their eye. The couple jointly decided to restrict their family to one child and therefore in 2015 Bablu opted for non-scalpel vasectomy.

“There is no fear, no tension. NSV was the quickest and safest way to ensure the prosperity and happiness of my family”, says Bablu as he put Kumkum off to sleep.
Contraceptives unlock one of the most dormant, but potentially powerful assets in development: women as decision-makers. When women have the power to make choices about their families, they tend to decide precisely what demographers, economists and development experts recommend. They invest in the long-term human capital of their families.
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Melinda Gates,
Co-founder of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation

Photo:
Pooja from Karimnagar district, Telangana, feels spacing the birth of her two children has benefitted her health tremendously. In the photo Pooja gleams with joy holding her one month old baby.
Men Matter:
Engaging men in India's reproductive health goals

We thank all families for allowing us to take a peek into their homes and lives. We salute the champions and the motivators for their actions and commitment in ensuring family planning is seen as a human right.