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# Leveraging spousal communication as a gateway behavior in the context of an integrated health project in Mali

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**USAID**  
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE



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Communication et Promotion de la Santé



**JOHNS HOPKINS**  
BLOOMBERG SCHOOL  
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# Background

- Prior research suggests that spousal communication about family planning is associated with multiple behaviors including use of contraceptives, hand-washing, early initiation of breastfeeding, and HIV testing (Schwandt, 2015).
- We use quantitative and qualitative formative research to explore the role of spousal communication as a gateway behavior in the context of an integrated health project in Mali.

# Gateway Behavior

- A positive behavior that can facilitate or catalyze other positive behaviors.
- Example: antenatal care

# Methods: Quantitative

- A three-stage sampling design was used to survey 4,409 women of reproductive age (ages 18-44) in 5 regions of Mali covering a range of health behaviors including family planning, maternal and child health, malaria, HIV, and water and sanitation.
- Data were collected in the context of the Keneya Jemu Kan project baseline, a five year USAID-funded integrated health project.
- Regions: Bamako, Koulikoro, Kayes, Sikasso, & Mopti

# Methods: Quantitative Analyses

- Multivariate logistic regression analyses were conducted in Stata to examine the association between spousal communication about family planning (considered here a proxy for overall spousal communication) and all behavioral health outcomes, controlling for age, education, marital status, parity, polygamous/monogamous, socioeconomic status, region and urban or rural.

# Methods: Qualitative

- Qualitative data were collected in 4 regions of Mali through 33 focus group discussions and 64 in-depth interviews with women of reproductive age, male partners, mothers-in-law, fathers-in-law, and healthcare workers.
- Addressed primarily reproductive, maternal and child health.
- Regions: Bamako, Sikasso, Kayes, and Mopti
- Transcripts were analyzed in French and coded for emergent themes.

# Results: Quantitative

- Only 30% of female survey respondents reported discussing family planning with their spouse in the past 12 months.

# Results: Quantitative

- Spousal communication about family planning was significantly and positively associated with multiple desired health behaviors including:
  - use of modern contraceptives (AOR 9.11<sup>\*\*\*</sup>)
  - getting antenatal consultations (AOR 1.87<sup>\*\*\*</sup>) (including having the first ANC in the first trimester (AOR 1.23<sup>\*\*</sup>) and least 4 ANC (AOR 1.67<sup>\*\*\*</sup>))
  - taking sulfadoxine-pyrimethamine (SP) during pregnancy (AOR 1.69<sup>\*\*\*</sup>)
  - getting tested for HIV during ANC (AOR 1.74<sup>\*\*\*</sup>)
  - health facility delivery (AOR 1.86<sup>\*\*\*</sup>)
  - getting a post-natal exam (AOR 1.40<sup>\*\*\*</sup>)
  - seeking treatment for child's cough (AOR 2.37<sup>\*\*\*</sup>)
  - completing childhood vaccinations (AOR 1.3<sup>\*\*\*</sup>)
  - handwashing with soap and water before eating (soap: AOR 1.69<sup>\*\*\*</sup>; water: AOR 1.23<sup>\*\*</sup>), after cleaning baby's bottom (soap: AOR 1.41<sup>\*\*\*</sup>; water: AOR 1.27<sup>\*\*</sup>), and after using the toilet (soap: AOR 1.33<sup>\*\*\*</sup>; water: AOR 1.21<sup>\*</sup>)
  - using a condom at last sex (AOR 1.62<sup>\*\*\*</sup>)

[p ≤ 0.05<sup>\*</sup>; p ≤ 0.01<sup>\*\*</sup>; p ≤ 0.001<sup>\*\*\*</sup>]

# Results: Quantitative

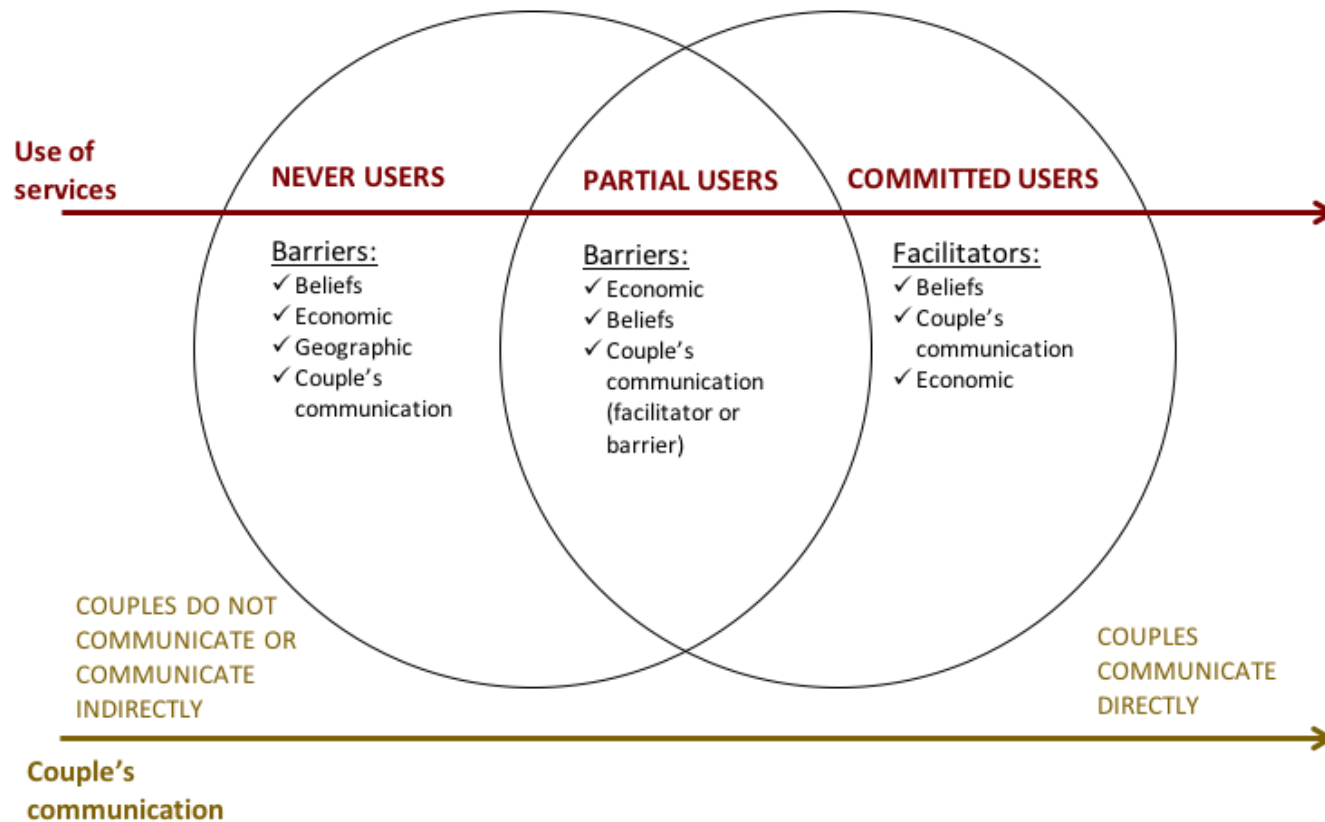
- Spousal communication about family planning was not significantly associated with:
  - Getting post-natal care within 24 hours (AOR 1.18)
  - Seeking treatment for fever (AOR 1.08)
  - Prompt treatment for fever (AOR 1.33)
  - Giving ORS (AOR 1.33)
  - Using soap (AOR 1.2) or water (AOR .94) to wash hands before feeding child
  - Using a mosquito net (AOR 1.28)

# Results: Qualitative

- Couples can be grouped into three categories:
  - those who communicate about maternal and infant health directly with each other
  - those who communicate through an intermediary (often the mother-in-law), and
  - those who do not communicate at all

# Results: Qualitative

- Couple's communication can be mapped onto a spectrum of use of maternal health services including antenatal care and delivery at a health facility



# Results: Qualitative

- Couples with low communication highlight how conversations around sensitive topics like pregnancy elicit negative emotions and are therefore avoided
- Example audience profile of a woman who is in a low communication couple and has partial use of maternal health services:

*When I got pregnant, I didn't say anything to my husband. Telling my husband that I'm pregnant makes me uncomfortable. I'm ashamed to talk to him about those things because some men think that a woman who talks about those things is shameless and he'll say, 'my wife has no shame, she talks to me about her pregnancy at 1 or 2 months, I don't like that.' If he asked me, I could tell him, but he doesn't ask me.*

# Results: Qualitative

- Interestingly, men expressed a desire for more communication around maternal and child health: *How can we act if they don't tell us?*
- Rather than describing women who initiate conversations about pregnancy as “shameless” or “lacking in modesty” as women fear, men describe women who keep pregnancy secret as “selfish,” “proud” and “refusing to ask for help.”

# Discussion

- Spousal communication is an important gateway behavior for a number of desired health behaviors in Mali
- Integrated health project might focus on determinants of multiple health behaviors like spousal communication or gender norms
- There is room for improvement
- Next steps in Mali are to use an entertainment education approach to promote spousal communication through a game show on maternal health

# Jigisigi Kene Gameshow

- Emphasize the importance of spousal communication for goal attainment
- Model spousal communication in fun and lighthearted manner
- Address knowledge around key health behaviors
- Increase spousal communication
- Increase adoption of key maternal health behaviors





# Thank you!

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