

SHIFTING NORMS TO CONQUER POLIO:

Male Engagement Strategies for Defaulters in India and Nigeria

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BACKGROUND

Over the last 19 years, CORE Group Polio Project (CGPP) has employed a variety of SBCC strategies to promote polio vaccination and address vaccine non-compliance. While gender differences have not been found in vaccination coverage, gender norms related to roles, behavioral expectations, and power dynamics strongly impact decision making. Knowledge about polio vaccine and its importance has increased steadily among mothers who are part of CGPP. However, vaccine-seeking behaviors have not always followed suit.

CGPP identified that while women were primary caregivers of children, they often had limited power to act on health information. By contrast, men often made decisions about family health, but did not have strong knowledge about vaccination. Non-supportive fathers, therefore, act as barriers to immunization by not granting permission or by withholding financial support.

To address this disparity, CGPP developed country-specific SBCC strategies to engage men in vaccination decision making and encourage couple communication. CGPP country teams identified “gathering places” and trusted influencers for men, and used this information to craft interventions.



RELIGIOUS LEADER PREACHING TO MEN IN YOBE STATE, NIGERIA.



CGPP TRAINED BARBER INTERACTING IN UTTAR PRADESH, INDIA

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- Men often have primary power in family-decision making, but child health interventions tend to focus on education and programming for women. Equipping men with accurate information about vaccination and child health is central to improving the health and well-being of children.
- Behavior change strategies must be couched in the norms and cultural context of the community. To engage men, it is important to identify gathering spaces and safe spaces, those in which they are most comfortable and receptive.
- Intimate knowledge of communities, gender norms, and traditional cultural practices is essential to the development of effective strategies.
- Multi-pronged approaches are needed in polio vaccination and in child health interventions. Programs should continue to empower mothers and female caregivers with knowledge, engage fathers to be advocates for vaccination and child health, and use community influencers to model positive behaviors in communities.
- CGPP will continue to engage men in programming and look for new and innovative solutions. Future programming will focus on male engagement coupled with female empowerment and the use of community influencers.

Acknowledgments

- CORE Group Polio Project has received funding from USAID since 1999.
- CORE Group Polio Project works with 7 international and 30 local NGOs in 7 countries.
- We would like to acknowledge the CGPP frontline workers who work tirelessly to ensure that every child in their community is protected against polio.

INTERVENTION

CGPP India's Barbershop Initiative

- Barbers are an integral part of Indian life and are seen as trusted sources of information. Barbershops are important meeting places for men to discuss various issues.
- 415 barbers in Meerut District (a high-risk district in Uttar Pradesh) were selected
- Barbers were trained by CGPP on the importance and benefits of polio immunization, taught interpersonal communication skills, and given flyers, printed rate cards, and aprons.
- Barbers were instructed to initiate conversations about vaccination, dispel misconceptions, notify customers of upcoming campaigns, and distribute behavior change materials.

CGPP Nigeria's Iftar Strategy

- CGPP program staff attributed low coverage rates in 4 focal states to lack of knowledge and demand for vaccination by men.
- Non-compliant households were identified
- Iftar, evening meetings to break Ramadan fast, were gathering places for men following work.
- Religious leaders were trained by CGPP to address fathers during Iftar and mosque announcements, providing information about polio vaccination.
- Men were encouraged to ask questions and male peer educators were available to dispel misconceptions and allay fears.

FINDINGS

CGPP India's Barbershop Initiative

- Knowledge about polio rose sharply in selected barbershops.
- Downward trends in the percentage of missed children during the recent polio vaccination campaigns were recorded.
- During the most recent campaign 7.2% of children were missed vs. 8.6% in the campaign prior to the Barbershop Initiative initiation.

CGPP Nigeria's Iftar Strategy

- Men are more comfortable and receptive to information about polio among same-gender groups.
- In Nigeria, religious venues represent a place where people are focused and receptive to new information, and this can be leveraged to give health messages
- Of the 2,567 children from non-compliant households, 92% were vaccinated in the week following Iftar community dialogues.