

Enhancing Male Participation in Reproductive Health care in the Philippines: A Multisectoral Approach

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Dear Editor,

In an article published in this journal, it highlighted the greater need for sexual reproductive health (SRH) services among Young Black males (YBM). From different studies, the authors have rightfully determined the barriers that hinder engagement in SRH, which include the lack of health insurance, ideas of masculinity that conflict with SRH care, stigma related to accessing services, and lack of knowledge regarding available services and care options (Burns et al., 2021). I support these claims and want to point out that the issue of men's less participation in SRH is a problem faced not only by YBM but by most of the male population worldwide, especially in developing countries like the Philippines. With this, I aim to elaborate on the reasons for this behavior and then propose interventions on how they can be encouraged more to participate in this essential health concern.

Filipino men's participation in the reproductive health care (RHC) is considered limited and not given much attention in the country. One major reason for this is something "cultural." In building a family, for example, men are traditionally viewed as the head of the family whose primary responsibility is to earn a living. Men do not want to get distracted from their responsibility as the "breadwinner" because it justifies their "manhood" and their ego will be hurt if not fulfilled. Women (mothers) are left to take charge of the household chores, budgeting, and making family planning (FP) decisions like birth spacing, type of contraceptive use, vaccination of kids, and many others. Husbands usually prefer watching a basketball game than attending FP/RHC seminars or doing some house repairs than having a prostate check-up. With this, men's lack of knowledge and belief in misinformation about RHC, especially regarding contraceptive use, become the most prominent barriers to their involvement (Lantiere et al., 2022). Another reason for men's reluctance to RHC is associated with religiosity. Since the Philippines is predominantly Christian, many men adhere to the Church's teaching on the immorality of induced abortion and artificial contraceptives.

Men resent their partners who attempted or completed an induced abortion without their knowledge. In such cases, men would disparage their partners and cease interacting with them to avoid the "sin" of induced abortion (Hirz et al., 2017). In another study, male and female married participants indicated the teachings against condom use as the reason they either stopped using or never started using condoms in their relationships and repeatedly referred to using condoms as a sin (Lucea et al., 2013).

These cultural and religious reasons are already embedded in the psyche of many Filipino men. There is a global need to encourage more involvement in RHC from men not only for their benefit but for their female partners as well. With this, I propose a multisectoral approach with the help and collaboration of various institutions such as the government, private companies, churches, and schools. With the assistance of private companies, the government should establish more programs that focus not only on the general information about RHC but especially on the benefits of men's involvement in it. The government can even provide incentives like cash, groceries, and discount privileges on services to encourage them. Church leaders/pastors should, in turn, hold seminars similar to *precana* (before the wedding rite), explaining that RHC aims to promote primary care and public health, which is for the common good, thus, not contrary to God's will. We must remember that the Church promotes the Catholic Social Teachings (CST), which banner human dignity, rights, and social justice issues. Finally, colleges and universities should integrate into their curriculum a general lesson on RHC with equal emphasis on men's involvement. These schools also have

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service-learning or social engagement departments where they can partner with local communities to campaign for the cause.

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