

# Gaps & Opportunities in Counseling Couples

A systematic review of couples counseling interventions in reproductive health



Fertility Awareness  
for Community  
Transformation

[www.irh.org/projects/fact\\_project](http://www.irh.org/projects/fact_project)



## CONTEXT

- ✓ In many parts of the world, men are the sole decision-makers on FP. Yet these decisions impact the health of both members of the couple.
- ✓ Studies on interventions with couples have shown that targeting both members of the couple, rather than the woman alone, is more effective.



## OBJECTIVE

- ✓ To identify and synthesize couples counseling interventions, in order to inform the development of couples counseling related to FP



## METHODS OVERVIEW

- ✓ Performed desk review of relevant studies
- ✓ Identified FP/RH interventions that target couples
- ✓ Developed compendium of couple counseling messages, approaches, and tools
- ✓ Held technical consultation with key stakeholders

# KEY FINDINGS

- 41 papers reviewed: 37 peer-reviewed articles and 4 reports.
- Interventions: Africa (15), Asia (12), North America (11), Latin America (1)
- Settings: Health facilities (27), Community Spaces (10), Participants' Homes (3), Workplace (1)
- Topics: HIV (23), FP (14), MCH (2), Post Abortion Care (2)
- Interventions were couples-based to couples-focused



**In general, improved FP outcomes as a result of couples counseling include:**



1. Improved contraceptive use



2. Improved couple communication associated with FP



3. Improved knowledge about fertility and FP



4. Increased male outreach and participation in counseling services

# IMPLICATIONS

- ✓ There are diverse couples counseling definitions and approaches; a common definition and framework are needed.
- ✓ Effective couples counseling approaches vary greatly in the intensity and depth in which they addressed gender and power dynamics, couple communication, and intimacy. Identifying most effective elements for addressing gender should be a next step.
- ✓ Few studies describe outreach strategies to increase men's participation in counseling services. More evidence is needed, particularly for the FP context.