



## RESEARCH INSIGHTS

### Pregnancy Tests Increase Contraceptive Clients among Health Workers: Evidence from a Randomized Controlled Trial in Madagascar

One challenge that community health workers face when they provide hormonal contraceptives to new clients is ruling out pregnancy. A randomized controlled trial in Madagascar found that offering the health workers pregnancy tests to distribute for free increases their number of new contraceptive clients.

In Madagascar, as in the rest of sub-Saharan Africa, use of family planning remains low—often due to poor access to health services. In remote and rural areas, community health workers (CHWs) provide family planning education and contraceptives. Madagascar is among more than a dozen African countries where health workers use a six-question pregnancy checklist before providing oral or injectable contraceptives. But many CHWs do not trust the checklist and deny these contraceptives to non-menstruating women. In addition, many women categorized by the checklist as “could be pregnant” are not pregnant. This translates into missed opportunities to meet the needs of women who want to use contraceptives. Providing CHWs with pregnancy test kits may increase the number of family planning clients they serve. Women who want to check their pregnancy status may approach CHWs for the kits, which may create an opportunity for family planning counseling.

#### Methods

The SHOPS project conducted a randomized controlled trial that included 622 CHWs in three regions of Madagascar. CHWs were randomly assigned, at the individual level, to a group that was offered pregnancy test kits and training on their use (treatment group) and a control group that received neither the kits nor training. The study team conducted a baseline survey of CHWs to gather information on their background and client load. The team also collected data on family planning services provided by the CHWs during the four months following the training. The researchers compared the number of new hormonal contraceptive clients who purchased their contraceptives from CHWs in the treatment group compared to the number in the control group. The difference in new clients between the two groups represents the effect of the intervention. The study used multivariate regression analysis to adjust for background characteristics that differed between the treatment and the control group CHWs.



*A community health worker explains the various methods of family planning to an interested woman.*

#### Key Findings

- The intervention increased the number of new hormonal contraceptive clients who purchase their contraceptives from CHWs by 24 percent per month.
- CHWs do not use the pregnancy checklist as intended.
- CHWs likely used the pregnancy tests as substitutes for the checklist.

## Key Findings

### The intervention increased the number of new hormonal contraceptive clients who purchased contraceptives from CHWs by 24 percent per month.

The intervention increased the number of new hormonal contraceptive clients per CHW by 0.6 clients per month (see figure). This represents a 24 percent increase in the number of new hormonal contraceptive clients who purchased contraceptives in an average month compared to the control group.

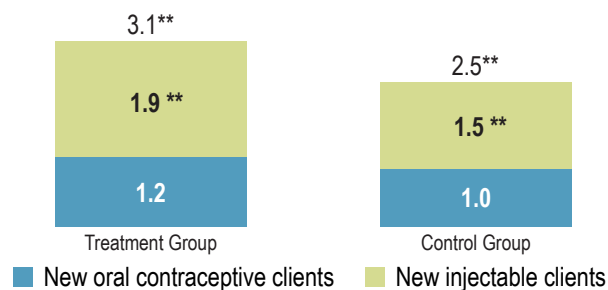
### CHWs do not use the pregnancy checklist as intended.

The baseline survey conducted prior to the intervention found that half of CHWs considered the pregnancy checklist to be reliable. Yet 94 percent of CHWs believed they could not provide hormonal contraceptives to non-menstruating women, and 91 percent of them reported that they had been instructed not to prescribe these contraceptives to non-menstruating women. This indicates that the training on the checklist may not have adequately conveyed how it should be used.

### CHWs likely used the pregnancy tests as substitutes for the checklist.

Each group—treatment and control CHWs—reported using the checklist 2.5 times per month. This translates into lower use of the checklist per new hormonal contraceptive client in the treatment group compared to the control group. It also indicates that CHWs in the treatment group likely used the pregnancy tests as substitutes for the checklist (although they were not instructed to do so during the training).

## Increased number of new contraceptive clients among CHWs



Notes: Regression-adjusted means,  $n = 1,554$

The number of oral and injectable contraceptive clients in the control group does not sum to the total due to rounding.

\*\*Indicates the difference was significant at the 95% level ( $p < 0.05$ )

## Policy Implications

The study findings suggest that offering CHWs free pregnancy test kits and training on how to use them enables the workers to increase the number of new hormonal contraceptive clients to whom they sell contraceptives. This intervention is a promising approach to increase adoption of hormonal contraceptives in Madagascar and other countries, particularly in settings where health workers are required to rule out pregnancy for new family planning clients without using the pregnancy checklist. Costs of pregnancy test kits have decreased considerably in recent years, making them an increasingly affordable option for low-income countries.

This summary is based on research conducted by the SHOPS project. For more information, contact [info@shopsproject.org](mailto:info@shopsproject.org).

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For more information about the SHOPS project, visit: [www.shopsproject.org](http://www.shopsproject.org)



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