WHAT IS WELLSHARE INTERNATIONAL?

WellShare is a non-profit organization based in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Locally, we partner with immigrant and refugee communities. We support people to understand how to stay healthy in the U.S. We work with communities to share information and improve the health of individuals, families, and their communities.

WellShare and St. Catherine University – Partners in Research

In 2015, WellShare partnered with St. Catherine University to ask Somali community members about communication and decision-making related to child spacing. We talked to 10 women and 10 men, all married Somali adults living in the Twin Cities. We wanted to know:

• How do Somali community members communicate with their spouse and make decisions about child spacing and contraceptive use?
• What barriers and facilitators do Somali community members experience when communicating about child spacing and contraceptive use with their spouse?
• How can programs and communities in the Twin Cities support Somali couples in achieving their fertility goals?

What is child spacing?

Child spacing is a practice in which people decide and act on when they want to have children and how often they want to have children. Child spacing provides health, social, and economic benefits for individuals, families, and communities. It is a way to make sure a baby and mother are healthy and strong before another baby comes. It is not meant to limit the number of children you have in your family.

What did we know already?

Our engagement with the Twin Cities Somali community over the last 15+ years has shown us that couples could benefit from additional support:

- Communication between African-born spouses about contraception can have a positive impact on contraceptive use1-6
- Husband’s attitude and opposition toward contraception, often related to religious beliefs and practices, are reported barriers to contraceptive use among Somali females7-8
- Somali women have reported feeling more comfortable to discuss family size and contraceptive use once they emigrate out of Somalia and to cultures similar to the U.S.7

COUPLE COMMUNICATION AND DECISION-MAKING RELATED TO CHILD SPACING AMONG SOMALI MEN AND WOMEN IN THE TWIN CITIES

RESEARCH AND FUTURE ACTIVITIES
What did we learn from talking with Somali community members?

- Importantly, the majority of community members that we talked to reported discussing child spacing with their spouse at some point in their marriage.
- All community members that were asked about Islamic teaching on child spacing were aware that it is supported and allowed—for some of these participants, this was an important factor in their willingness to use and to talk about child spacing methods.
- Couples that had experienced births spaced very close together, or the desire to prevent this, listed this as the main motivating reason to talk about child spacing methods with their spouse.
- Nearly all of the community members we talked to put a high value on shared decision-making and on compromise with their spouse, suggesting that both males and females should be informed and equipped to communicate and make decisions about child spacing.
- Men are not being reached through formal sources such as health care providers, which may impact the quantity and quality of information that they receive.

What recommendations do we have?

- Programs and providers should integrate religious beliefs and leaders when educating Somali couples of reproductive age and when introducing the topic of child spacing methods.
- As often as possible, child spacing education should be offered before or early in marriage to help couples prevent short birth intervals and potentially avoid certain complications.
- Continuing a wide variety of programming approaches for both men and women would be beneficial to the community as some couples prefer to be educated together while others prefer to be educated separately.
- Finding ways to reach men with accurate information on child spacing is essential to helping couple’s meet their fertility goals.

For more, check out our new video: Child Spacing – Somali Family Decision Making Supported by Islamic Scholars and Healthcare Professionals

This video was informed by the research described above. It is the first of many tools that we hope will support couples to strengthen their communication related to child spacing.

View online: [vimeo.com/222898357](vimeo.com/222898357) or order the free DVD: [wellshareinternational.org](wellshareinternational.org)