

# Who helps women uptake services along the PMTCT cascade?

## The role of social network engagement for overcoming barriers to service uptake in Rushinga District, Zimbabwe

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### BACKGROUND

- HIV prevalence among women attending antenatal care (ANC) in Zimbabwe is 15.9%.<sup>1</sup>
- Mashonaland Central Province is a remote, rural province, with some of the lowest uptake rates for services along the PMTCT cascade.<sup>2</sup>
- Social support gained through social networks are known to influence health behaviours, knowledge and uptake of HIV services.<sup>3</sup>
- The Action Birth Card (ABC) is a goal-setting and planning tool that engages pregnant women to identify barriers, problem solve, and plan for uptake of underutilized services along the PMTCT cascade together with individuals in their social network (Picture 1).
- Services pregnant women are encouraged to plan for, and later reflect on how they would do things better or differently in future pregnancies in the ABC include: Early Antenatal Care (ANC) before 14 weeks gestation, HIV test for both partners in ANC, 4+ ANC attended, develop a birth plan, deliver at a health facility, prompt post natal care for mothers and infants.

**What is a 'social network'?**  
Social networks are groups of individuals who share a commonality. The common bond of social networks may be the community in which members live, their religion, common friends or shared culture or beliefs.

### OBJECTIVE

- To document the perceptions of women who received an Action Birth Card in their most recent pregnancy regarding members of their social network most helpful in supporting health service uptake.

### METHODS

In November 2014, our cross-sectional survey conveniently sampled women that received an ABC in their previous pregnancy living in the catchment of 5 rural health clinics in Rushinga District.

- Interviews were conducted using a standardized questionnaire regarding service uptake during pregnancy.
- Women used a 5-point Likert scale (1= strongly agree to 5= strongly disagree) to rate the extent to which individuals "helped to overcome barrier to service uptake" for each service goal in the ABC.
- Data were analysed descriptively using Stata V.12.0.



Picture 1. ABC 'who can help?' page

### RESULTS

Table 1. Sociodemographic characteristics (N=174)

		N	%
<b>Age (years)</b>	<20	20	11.5%
	20 – 30	100	57.5%
	> 30	53	30.5%
<b>Total pregnancies</b>	1	29	16.7%
	2-3	85	48.9%
	4+	58	33.3%
<b>Residential Status</b>	Urban low density	2	1.1%
	Rural	170	97.7%
<b>Marital status</b>	Married monogamous	154	88.5%
	Married polygamous	13	7.5%
	Divorced or separated	3	1.7%
	Widowed	1	0.5%
<b>Level of education</b>	Primary	63	36.2%
	Form 1 and 2	35	20.1%
	Form 3 and 4	74	42.5%
	Form 5+	2	1.1%
<b>Religion</b>	Apostolic	104	59.8%
	Christian	46	26.4%
	Traditional or Other	24	13.8%
<b>Distance from Facility</b>	<1km	17	9.8%
	1-5km	97	55.7%
	5-10km	37	21.3%
	10km+	21	12.1%

#### Respondent Characteristics

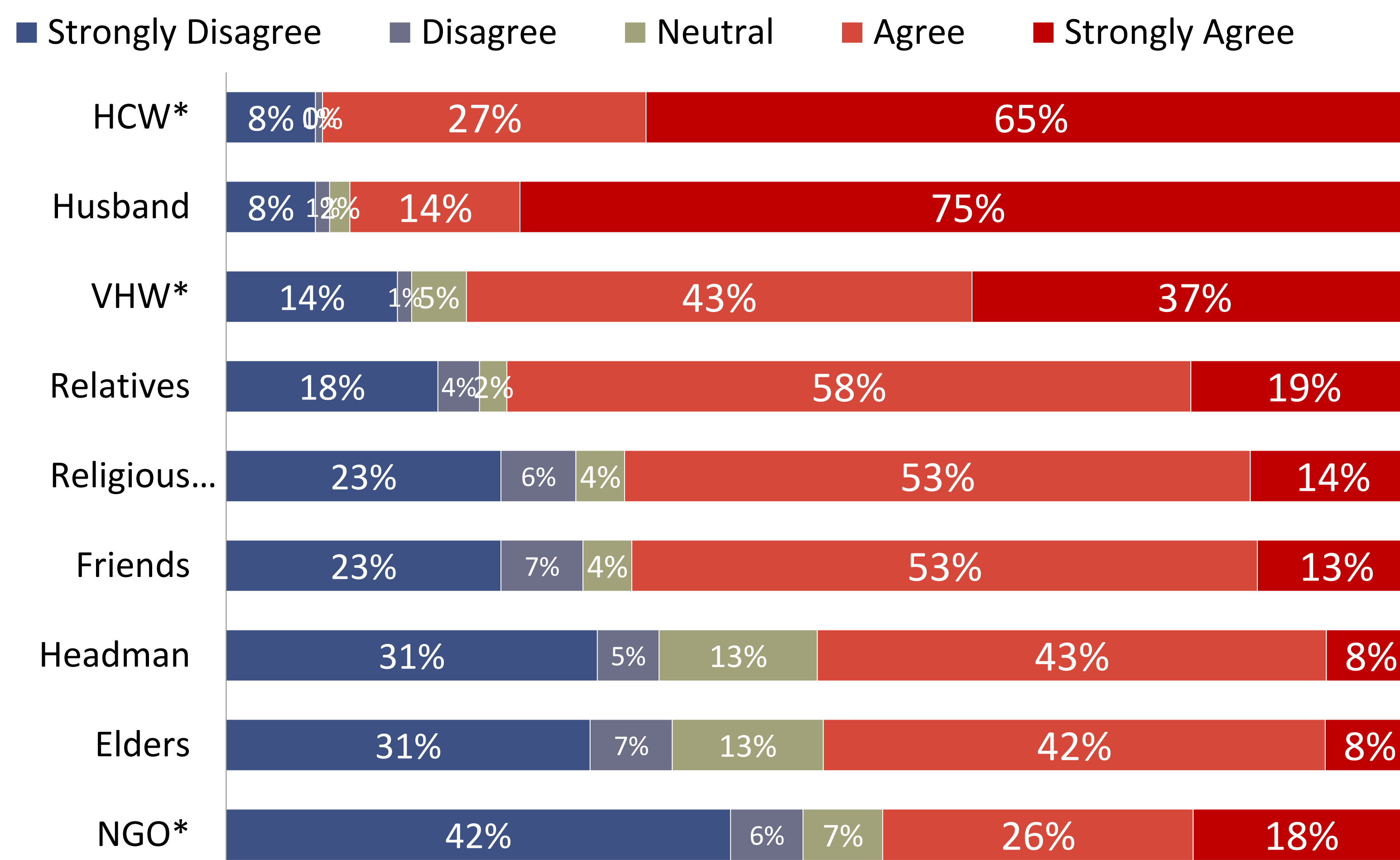
Among 174 women interviewed, average age was 26.9yrs (range 16-40yrs), average parity 2.5; majority were in a monogamous marriage (88.5%); belonged to the Apostolic faith (59.8%) and lived between 1-5km to the nearest health facility (55.7%)

#### Individuals in social network providing greatest help for service uptake

- Overall, husbands/male partners (n=131, 75%) were identified as individuals to be most helpful ("strongly agree") for overcoming barriers to service uptake (Figure 1)
- More male partners attended first ANC visit and were reported to be aware of their own HIV status in their partner's recent pregnancy with ABC planning than previous pregnancy without ABC planning (chi-square, p<0.001).
- When Likert categories were grouped (agree and disagree), clinic-based Health Care Workers (HCWs) (n=159; 91.3%) were rated as the most helpful group, followed by husbands (n=156; 89.7%) and Village Health Workers (VHWs) (n=79.9%).
- Headmen, village elders (n=65; 37.4%) and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) were perceived as least helpful for helping to overcome barriers to service uptake.

### RESULTS continued

Figure 1. Likert rating individuals "who helped you to overcome barriers to service uptake"



#### Perceptions of Male Involvement

- A key theme of focus group discussions regarding social support generated through use of the ABC was the tool's influence in promoting positive social norms related to male engagement in maternal health care.

Picture 2. Positive portrayals of male engagement



"The project is good because men would never want to be seen at the clinic, but because of the ABCs men are now seeing how necessary it is for them to be involved..."  
- Woman, Nyamatikiti Clinic

"We now know it is important to involve our partners during pregnancy so that we can deliver at a health facility."  
- Woman, Nyamatikiti Clinic

"The ABC helped me a lot - the pictures in the card helped my husband to realize that other male partners accompany their spouses for ANC bookings and HIV testing."  
- Woman, Rusambo Clinic

### CONCLUSIONS

- Our findings indicate engagement of social networks at community-level could be a crucial strategy for generating demand and uptake for underutilised services across the PMTCT cascade among rural women.
- Male partners were viewed as of most helpful for overcoming barriers to service uptake, however health care cadres at both facility and community-level were perceived as crucial for supporting service uptake - indicating importance of including existing health care workers in any community-based demand generation activities for PMTCT services.
- Low ratings of helpfulness of more distal/hierarchical social contacts such as village elders, headmen and NGOs can be seen as evidence of ownership and empowerment among women who received ABCs to overcome barriers together with more proximal/household/community level social contacts.
- Social network analyses are required to better understand the how network characteristics, such as size, composition, and density influence health-seeking within social networks of rural pregnant women.
- Significant increases in uptake HIV testing by male partners in ANC among women who used the ABC, indicates benefits of social network engagement for HIV service uptake for both partners.
- The impact of social network engagement upon health-seeking and outcomes of HIV positive women, their partners and children requires more rigorous study.

### REFERENCES

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