



## Characteristics of Users of Reproductive Health Services in Kenya: Who Are We Serving?

### Background

In recent years there has been increased recognition of the need to improve the delivery of reproductive health services, most notably to ensure that reproductive health services reach all sectors of the population including the poorest of the poor. Despite this many questions remain as to the extent to which reproductive health services are reaching all sectors of the population that they are designed to serve. Are they being used only by select groups, such as the relatively wealthy or by those who are for some reason empowered to seek health services? This Kenya study was part of a multi country overview which also included Malawi, Tanzania, Bangladesh, Nepal, Mexico and Yemen.

### Research Aims

The aim of the study was to address the question of whether a sample of Marie Stopes reproductive health clinics are serving all sectors of their local population by examining how the clients of those clinics reflect the characteristics of the local population in the close environs of the clinic, both socio-economically and demographically. The focus was on individual and household characteristics, on the distance travelled to clinics, on the reasons for attending the services and on any barriers to use either in terms of cost or in terms of knowledge of the services.

### Methods

The study took place in and around three Marie Stopes clinics, Pangani, Eastleigh (Nairobi) and Muranga. The design involved exit interviews, household surveys and focus groups, with all the

fieldwork between April and August 2002. The overall strategy was to collect data from exit interviews on clinic users, and data on the local population surrounding the study clinics using a household survey. In addition, the focus groups were to provide an insight into community views and perceptions with regard to both the delivery and uptake of reproductive health services. The samples included a little under 100 exit interviews in each clinic; around 100 interviews in the households in the close environs of each clinic and three focus groups among the local residents of each clinic.

### Characteristics of Clinic Users

- Clients were overwhelmingly aged at least 20 with at least primary and, very often, secondary education. Most clients did have at least two household assets such as radios, televisions, phones or fridges.
- Women attended the clinics for a variety of reasons, most frequently for pregnancy related or family planning reasons. A minority attended for general health ailments.
- Family planning clients were older and had more assets than those who attended for pregnancy related or general health reasons.
- The majority of clients at each of the clinics tended to have travelled for more than 30 minutes to reach the clinic. At one of the clinics these clients were rather more likely to be single.
- Compared to local residents using other reproductive health services the clients of Marie Stopes clinics tended to have more education and a greater number of household assets. In two of the clinics those

who had used other services tended to be younger, in particular aged below 20 years.

### **Reasons for Choosing Marie Stopes and Attitudes to Services**

Clients at each of the clinics were overwhelmingly satisfied with the service they had received:

'Marie Stopes has good services...clients...receive quick service and are not kept waiting for long periods of time in the the waiting room. Drugs are always available. The staff members are courteous and understanding. They don't discriminate patients. As long as you are there for something no matter how you look you are well treated.'

Reasons for choosing Marie Stopes over other services were largely associated with quality of care and with the competence of staff. Many clients reported they had chosen Marie Stopes on the recommendation of other people. Marie Stopes clinics were also praised for their confidentiality and anonymity – making them key service providers for the delivery of STI services:

'I would just come here at Marie Stopes because it is both private and confidential in their service and you will never hear that so and so came to Marie Stopes and she was done for ABC...'

The major problem perceived by the focus group respondents was that of cost. While this had not deterred the clients attending the clinics it might reflect the relatively high levels of

education among clients of these Marie Stopes clinics (it must be noted that these clinics were not specifically targeted at poor clients unlike some Marie Stopes clinics):

'They may have good services but the charges are too costly. And in some hospitals the services are poor but the charges are affordable'

### **Conclusions**

The three Marie Stopes clinics covered in this study are serving clients through a range of reproductive and other health services that are seen by clients to be of **high quality and delivered by staff who are well qualified.**

However it is also clear that the poor are not accessing the clinics in this study and this is seen largely to reflect cost. Instead the poor appear to be accessing other clinics which are perceived to be of a lower standard.

Quality of care is thus seen as a major criterion in the choice of reproductive health service provider. **Further research is needed to identify pathways to the provision of high quality reproductive health services for poor people.**

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