



## PROGRAM BRIEF

THE MANOFF GROUP

### Albania Family Planning Project: Behavior Change Communication

*The Manoff Group led behavior change communication for the Albania Family Planning Project (2004–2007), using innovative qualitative research to create well-designed mass media and tailored individual counseling that produced remarkable increases in acceptance of modern methods in the pilot areas.*

#### **About AFPP**

The Albania Family Planning Project (AFPP) — funded by USAID and implemented by John Snow, Inc— aimed to increase use of modern, effective contraceptive methods and decrease abortion rates through three components: contraceptive security, health provider training, and behavior change communication (BCC). The Manoff Group was subcontracted to implement the BCC component.

#### **Formative Research**

A research study that was critical to shaping program activities began with a literature review, followed by ethnographic interviews then Trials of Improved Practices (TIPS), a participatory research technique developed by The Manoff Group. The purpose of our research was to lay the basis for the behavior change strategy and specific communication interventions, such as mass media and community mobilization activities.

Albanian project staff and interviewers were trained to conduct the individual in-depth interviews and trials of proposed new practices. The interviews contained an adaptation of the Zaltman Metaphor Elicitation Technique (ZMET), a projective cognitive elicitation technique used in commercial market research that very rapidly lets the researcher access deeply felt,

culturally shared cognitive domains. The interviews provided a holistic understanding of family planning, its place in marriage and relationship to childbearing, and how these concepts are influenced by gender roles and status.

Our research probed the meanings of various contraceptive methods to married men and women in our sample. They primarily relied on withdrawal, which to them expressed trust, love and intimacy within marriage.

Respondents also mentioned that withdrawal limited pleasure. Some couples occasionally “took a vacation” from withdrawal and used condoms or emergency contraception.

One wife voiced her husband’s situation this way: “With withdrawal, you have maximum pleasure but not for the whole time. With condoms you have pleasure for the whole time, but it’s *not* the maximum.”

Respondents had little knowledge of modern contraceptive methods, and what knowledge they had was often incorrect. For example, many perceived hormonal methods as harmful to women. This likely was due to the dissemination of limited and inaccurate information about modern contraception by the former government.

Most respondents had discussed family planning, and claimed that they made decisions on family planning jointly with their

spouses. However, men's views usually dominated, despite the fact that women had more information about contraceptives than men.

### **Communications Strategy**

Our research findings informed a communications strategy that relied on mass media and community outreach through individual counseling to promote behavior change.

**Mass Media:** We produced three TV spots, a call-in show, and a program in a national health TV series. The spots positioned family planning use in the context of the marital intimacy, trust, and love revealed through the formative research.



*Filming the urban TV spot*

Since research showed that pleasure was strongly linked to fertility regulation among couples, promotion of modern family planning methods in the spots hinted subtly at the pleasure and lack of restraint to be derived through relying on an effective modern method. The spots also presented wives as having at least an equal role in family planning decision making.

**Counseling for Behavior Change:** One of the reasons that women knew more about family planning was they discussed it with other women as well as their husbands, whereas men said they discussed family planning only with their wives. Since men were unwilling to discuss family planning outside of marriage, we decided that community mobilization would take the form of face-to-face communication, rather than through community events.

### **Outreach Negotiation Counseling**

*"It's not the fault of the man; it's the fault of the method."*



*Community nurse-midwife training*

Our staff incorporated insights and local metaphors gained from formative research into ONC training and on-the-job mentoring: When negotiating with husbands in favor of withdrawal, the ONC counselor might say, "Far more women have abortions than you would guess because withdrawal is not an effective method. It's not the fault of the man; it's the fault of the method." This addresses the underlying idea that withdrawal both expresses and demonstrates a man's mastery of himself and his wife's fertility, as well as tapping into men's expressed feelings of love and caring for their wives.

Our research and JSI Albanian experience suggested that doctors or midwives potentially could become a trusted source of contraceptive information because many respondents viewed them as knowledgeable. Thus, outreach relied on community nurse-midwives. We also linked trained Ministry of Health providers with the family planning logo to reinforce their expertise.

The outreach program trained community nurse-midwives in two districts to visit married couples door-to-door and provide "Outreach Negotiation Counseling" (ONC) based on the TIPs model of tailored individual negotiation counseling and the idea of contraceptive use as a series of behaviors and decisions, rather than an adopt or non-adopt decision.

## Results

We used the AFPP baseline and endline surveys and monitoring studies to gauge the effectiveness of BCC activities. The baseline and endline surveys were conducted with a large randomly selected national sample of 600 married women of reproductive age (age 15–45) interviewed at service delivery points. The baseline included a section on media viewing habits to inform broadcasting decisions.

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*In one pilot area, 65% of couples visited by a nurse-midwife accepted a modern family planning method.*

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The endline survey revealed that nearly 80% of the national sample had seen at least one TV spot and could repeat at least one message without prompting. The study also suggested that these respondents were more likely to change their behavior, e.g. go for family planning counseling.

A monitoring study in the two pilot areas where ONC had been implemented revealed a startling increase in modern contraceptive acceptance from the nationwide rate of 8% for modern methods: in one area, 56% of those visited by an ONC nurse-midwife accepted a modern family planning method. In the second area, 65% of those visited accepted a modern method.

## Conclusion

AFPP is an excellent example of how changes in behavior—accessing and accepting modern contraceptives—can occur in a relatively short period of time when project activities are built upon a sophisticated understanding of potential clients' behavior, relationships, and meanings. The results demonstrate the benefit of a well-designed media campaign accompanied by appropriate counseling.

### About The Manoff Group, Inc.

The Manoff Group, Inc. creates and applies innovative strategies to improve practices that enhance and save lives. We are pioneers in integrating behavior change into programs, and a leader in client-focused research, strategic communications, materials development, skills-based training, and capacity building. Our work with individuals, families, communities, and partner institutions achieves lasting change.

Celebrating 40 years of helping people help themselves