

Learning package: Garment factories

Chat! Contraception: an innovative, multimedia approach to empowering women

The innovative communication package, Chat! Contraception, empowers garment factory workers to make confident, informed decisions about their sexual and reproductive health.

Many garment factory workers experience barriers to accessing reproductive, maternal and newborn health (RMNH) services, including knowledge gaps, low self-efficacy and inhibiting attitudes and beliefs.

To address these challenges, Partnering to Save Lives (PSL) introduced *Chat! Contraception (Chat!)* in 16 factories. *Chat!* is an innovative behaviour change communication (BCC) package that was designed to engage garment factory workers and build their confidence so they can make informed decisions about their sexual and reproductive health (with a focus on family planning and safe abortion) and seek appropriate services as needed.

Chat! aims to break down communication barriers so that women are empowered to make safe, informed choices about sex, contraception and abortion. The package uses a *teach, engage, and challenge* model as follows:

- Short, activity-based sessions that cover communication and consent, contraception, sexually transmitted infections, and safe abortion in a comfortable space for women to learn;
- Video dramas featuring characters in a garment factory to engage workers' emotions as they relate to their everyday challenges;
- An interactive android mobile application, called Good Old Sister, that challenges workers to improve their understanding of key topics.

Facilitators are equipped with relevant knowledge to correct misconceptions, and a copy of the PSL referral directory with options for quality services near the factories.

Alongside the standard *Chat!* modules, PSL also developed *Chat!* for Him, which specifically engages men on topics including sexual and reproductive health, gender and consent.

Right: A garment factory worker tests her knowledge with the Chat! mobile quiz game.

Key results:

Chat! participants consistently demonstrated that they were improving their self-efficacy in navigating sexual and reproductive health matters, from negotiating sex and/or family planning with partners to seeking services.

PSL conducted a quantitative assessment of *Chat!* in December 2016 and found that:

- Use of modern family planning methods doubled among participants from 24.2% at baseline (in 2014) to 48.0% in 2016.
- Utilisation of sexual and reproductive health services reached 20.0% in 2016 compared to 8.6% at baseline.
- Self-efficacy scores improved. Workers who reported complete confidence to discuss contraception with partners reached 50.0% compared to 24.4% at baseline, and those with complete confidence to refuse sex with partners reached 50.0%, up from 16.8% at baseline.
- The percentage of workers who knew abortion was legal increased to 47.0%, compared to 7.9% at baseline.



Credit: Care

“I am confident talking with my husband about using family planning. I encourage him to learn about this as well because we need to take responsibility for this together.”

Sopheak, garment factory worker, Phnom Penh

Lessons learned

The results of *Chat!* show that it had positive impacts for participants, and helped them to develop the confidence to make informed health decisions and take action. *Chat!* also had benefits for the factories themselves. The following lessons were observed:

- Garment factories provided preliminary evidence during the PSL year four annual review that suggests that *Chat!* helped to improve productivity by reducing staff turnover by 36% and lowering absences without permission by 24%.
- The multimedia approach used by *Chat!* was highly successful for keeping participants engaged and interested. The stories that were presented were relevant and relatable for garment factory workers, and the materials were presented in ways that were fun and easy to understand.
- *Chat!* messages specifically addressed common misconceptions about family planning. Its results showed significant improvements in use of modern methods among workers, which were not observed outcomes of other PSL BCC activities. This suggests that ‘mythbusting’ messages are effective and should be incorporated into other BCC for family planning.
- *Chat!* requires trained facilitators for discussion sessions, but this can be costly and human resource intensive. Involving factory staff, such as infirmary nurses, as facilitators helped to overcome these challenges and strengthened the role of these staff as trusted providers of health information and services.
- Scheduling activities like discussion sessions is always challenging in garment factories. Managers and workers alike do not want long interruptions from their work day because of the loss of productivity and income. With innovative tools and strategies, like the *Chat!* mobile quiz game, workers can participate in the program at a time that suits them.

Further opportunities for empowerment

Chat! encouraged positive RMNH behaviours among participants. For other workers outside of the program, the same challenges of limited RMNH knowledge and skills persist and impact health outcomes, which suggests that wider roll out of BCC initiatives is warranted.

Chat! is proven and highly replicable and, beyond PSL, has already been extended to 33 garment and footwear factories and integrated into projects with other donors and brands, including GlaxoSmithKline, Levi’s, and Marks & Spencer. Scale up across additional garment factories will enable more workers to participate. Additionally, replicating the approach in other labour markets, such as the construction industry and on plantations, should be explored to reach other young, mobile populations of low-skilled workers with important knowledge and skills.

Recommendations

Chat! helped participants to feel confident and capable of taking action for better RMNH. For future programming, PSL recommends to:

- Incorporate messages that address common myths and misconceptions about modern family planning methods into BCC activities.
- Develop an evidence base for private sector investment in *Chat!* and worker well-being initiatives by documenting impacts on staff turnover, absenteeism and productivity.
- Continue concurrent quality improvement in infirmaries alongside BCC activities and encourage the involvement of infirmary staff in delivering health promotion messages.
- Encourage ownership of BCC activities within factories by meaningfully involving factory focal points from the beginning. Factories should invest in workplace health programs and use pre-existing resources like *Chat!* into the future.
- Expand BCC initiatives to other labour markets with low-skilled workforces.

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Partnering to Save Lives



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