



Family Planning and Sexual Health Project



Kachere Area, 2019

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High rates of population growth are a cause for concern around the world. UNICEF estimate that the population will grow from 19 to 30 million between now and 2030. At 4.4 children per family, Malawi's fertility rate is ninth highest in the world and is putting increasing pressure on the already strained resources in the country. Although provision of contraceptives is free, Malawi has a high unmet need for family planning services and the patriarchal nature of society here also means women are not often given a voice in decisions on family size.

Ripple Africa continues piloting a family planning and sexual health project to try to address how best to tackle this problem, starting in the area around Kachere Health Centre. During 2018, Khumbo Mphande, a nurse midwife, and Watson Chirwa, a health worker, spent time with school and community groups and couples to identify how best to encourage more people to access family planning. Research with these various groups has shown that the problem cannot be solved solely by informing people about the family planning methods available but has to also focus on encouraging more equal relationships between husband and wife as both husband and wife need to be invested in improving their lives so that they can plan how to change.

Therefore, 2019 has been an interesting year as alongside the school education classes, Khumbo and Watson have been working with more couples. Together they have been talking with couples to learn more about their views on small and large families, to understand people's current struggles and their aspirations for the future. Typically, in Malawi, women carry out all of the household work including fetching water, collecting wood, washing the clothes, cooking and caring for the children.

From September 2019, a number of couples have been challenged to share these job roles, and they all found that by helping one another, they each had more time. Couples were then encouraged to think about what they can do with that extra time. They mentioned setting up small businesses, helping their children with school work and also relaxing with their partner and talking about what they want from their relationship. This included discussing the number of children they wanted and how they could manage their money better. It is these conversations that Ripple Africa believes are the key to couples deciding how to improve their futures, and most of the couples agreed that smaller families would mean that they could have a better quality of life. This naturally leads them to access and use family planning methods.

One couple, Phillip and Joyce, have written up a rota. Phillip said, "During the morning Joyce does the chores and I do them in the afternoon. This gives Joyce time to see her friends, and we have also been able to plan better for our future."

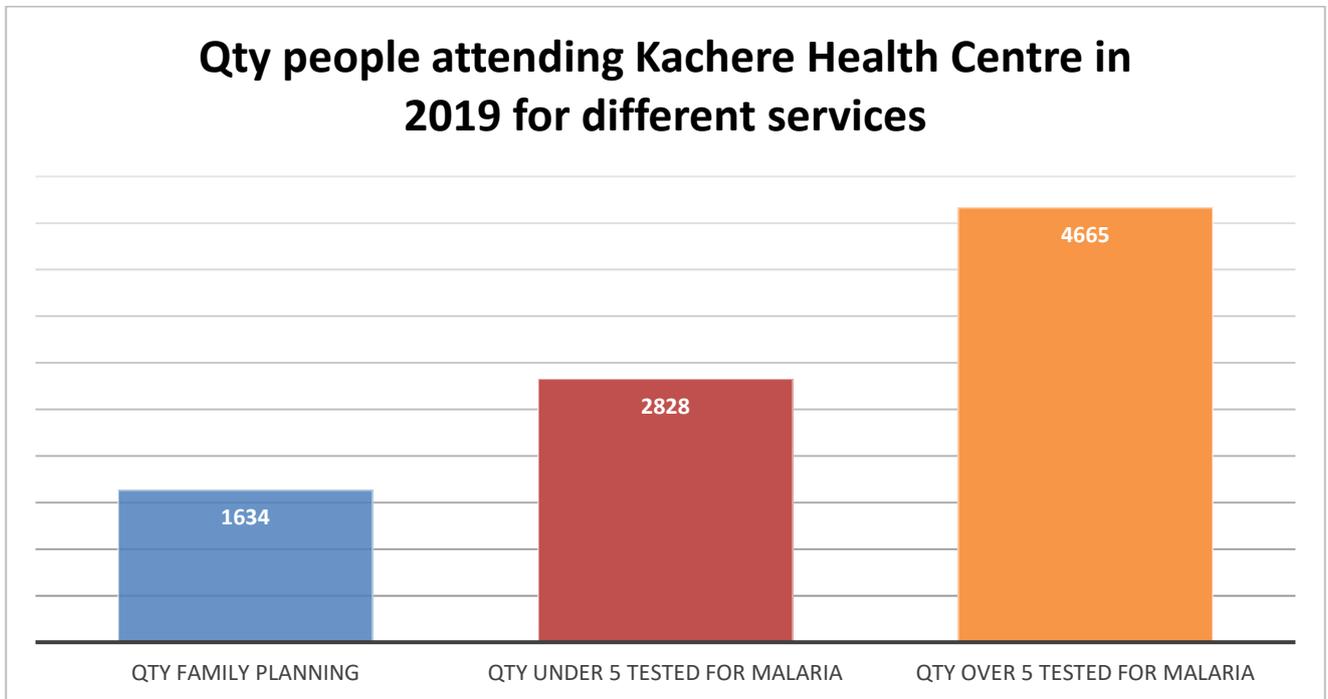
Education is clearly key but we are also working in partnership with local government health centres who provide the contraceptive methods to measure the impact of the project.



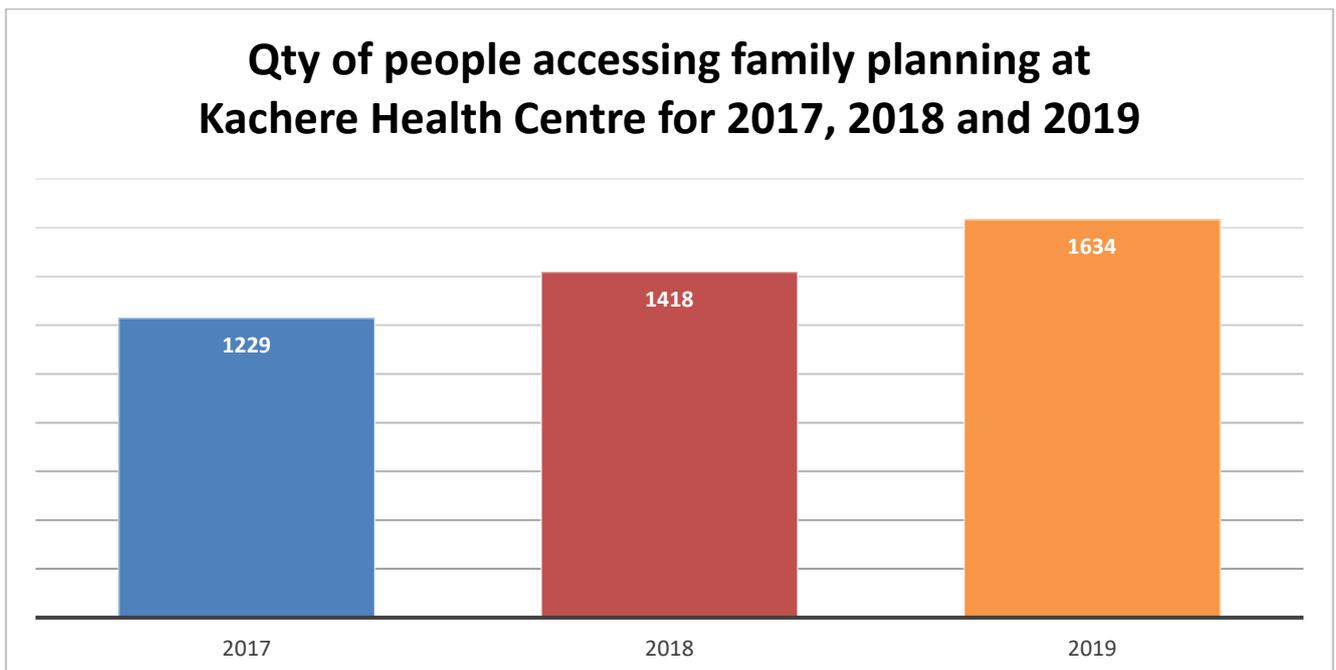
Watson explaining to Philip and Joyce about the Family Planning methods available.

Family Planning Distributed

We have collected the data from 2017, 2018 and 2019 on family planning and malaria testing from Kachere Health Centre. Comparing data on malaria testing and family planning gives an indication of how much community members value having access to each of these services. We hope, in the years to come, these will equal out and more people will value family planning.



Positively though, the number of men and women accessing family planning has increased year on year since we began collecting data in 2017. This shows the community are beginning to understand more about family planning and the options available to them.



Although the number of women accessing contraceptive methods has increased, there is still more education needed to ensure everybody understands and knows about the services available to them. We have found that many young couples only want two or three children compared to the traditionally larger families yet they do not know about all the contraceptive methods that they could choose from.

Kachere Health Centre serves approximately 26,000 people. Of this number, approximately 7,500 are estimated to be females eligible to use family planning. The number of men receiving condoms in 2019 was 380 receiving a combined total of 7,740 condoms. This is significantly lower than in previous years due to a shortage of supply. In 2017, 558 men received 12,862 condoms and in 2018, 513 men received 11,970.

The most popular form of contraceptive for women in 2019 was the Depo Provera injection. A total of 1,263 injections were given. This figure includes women returning as the injection is given every three months. In 2018 only 667 Depo Provera injections were given across the year. This demonstrates that some of the misunderstandings and myths surrounding this family planning method are being corrected by the various medical teams.

The women we worked with in 2018 said they knew little about the different options but have really valued the informative talks given by Khumbo on the methods available and the positives and negatives associated with each of them.

Outreach

Community groups

In 2018 we reported that the women and men we were working with knew very little about family planning options and therefore were unable to pass on any knowledge to their children. Equally, the lack of communication between partners was also a barrier. Since then, these



couples have begun talking more and other couples are keen to be involved. At present, Khumbo and Watson meet with 24 couples every other week. Whilst a relatively small number, it is important for the team to identify how best to share the message in order to then be able to reach larger numbers in the future. As well as meeting couples, they also run *bao* games, football and netball matches and volleyball games, reaching around 500 people across all four events. They also run awareness campaigns on market days reaching more than 200 people each time, meet at Under Five clinics across seven locations with around 80 mothers and fathers each time and meet with approximately 45 couples at church meetings. These meetings are hosted by

pastors and church elders and offer couples the opportunity to talk about spiritual and family matters.

Whilst the larger events don not allow for much question time, Khumbo and Watson's presence in these communities encourages those attending to speak with them at another point. Smaller games like *bao*, a game attended by only men, provide a really valuable opportunity for the men to ask questions and the team also pose questions to the group. It is not uncommon to hear lots of laughter coming from any group session as ideas, scenarios and knowledge on various subjects are explored.



At the end of 2019, one *bao* group really embraced new ideas with six friends heading off together to collect water from the borehole for their wives. A chore usually only carried out by women, the majority of the men achieved it without losing much water. They chatted as they left their homes to walk the 2km to the pump, had lots of laughter as they pumped the water and impressed their wives with this one helpful act.

Schools

Following on from the research carried out in 2018 at six primary schools and a secondary school, Khumbo and Watson have continued to run and support Life Skills lessons at the schools. The teachers have been really keen to involve them in these classes as it gives the students the opportunity to have their questions answered by healthcare professionals. The primary school sessions are with pupils in Standards Five to Eight and with all year groups at secondary level, and each class meets with the team twice a month. In 2019 we worked with 1,048 students.

From initially starting as an opportunity to gather information about the students' knowledge of sexual health and family planning, etc., the sessions now also include topics on peer pressure, drug and substance abuse, HIV/AIDS and antiretroviral drugs as well as gender, sexuality and child abuse – all of which appear in the Life Skills course.



Future

Khumbo and Watson are continuing their education programme within the schools and the community. We will continue to collect the data from the health centres and to work alongside other healthcare professionals to provide maximum information to those wanting it.

We are keen to further develop our education programme with parents and the community to highlight the benefits to girls who are already sexually active of accessing contraceptives rather than risk teenage pregnancy. If a girl gets pregnant, she has to drop out of school whilst the boy can continue his education. We also hope to encourage boys to use condoms to avoid the potential spread of HIV and other STIs.



The team will continue to work with couples individually and through community events to encourage more equal partnerships so that both men and women feel that they can discuss family planning and sex openly together and also have free time to explore opening a business, to see friends or to spend time together as a couple.

In order to maximise the potential of this project, we will be seeking funding to continue and to expand the team and the area we cover.