

# Encouraging Women to Use Call-in Health Information Services Improves Health Knowledge and Practices in Uganda



Viamo and IPA Uganda researchers conducted a randomized evaluation that found that use of Viamo's interactive voice response (IVR) call-in platform for health information improved sexual and reproductive health knowledge and behavior and iron supplement usage during pregnancy. Women also improved their family planning knowledge and decision-making and nutritional intake behaviors.

In Sub Saharan Africa, health information is often shared in mass media platforms like radio or television. However, this information does not always reach all households, often missing households with limited resources. This can impact how well they can improve health knowledge and behaviors. As cell phone ownership in the region is high, including in Uganda, evidence suggests that delivering information to people via cell phones may be effective. Leveraging this—Viamo, a social behavior change, technology-centered social enterprise—developed a platform that allows people to call in for free and receive high quality, up-to-date information on nutrition and sexual and reproductive health, reaching more than four million users in Uganda.

Researchers conducted a randomized evaluation to measure whether Viamo's platform, an IVR, call-in service, improved women's knowledge of sexual and reproductive health and use of vital iron supplements during pregnancy. The intervention involved 6,011 pregnant and recently pregnant women in Kampala, Rwampara, Katakwi, and Madi-Okollo—four randomly selected districts of Uganda who were exposed to the platform over a period of 14-18 months. Women participating in the study were randomly assigned to the following groups:

- **Intervention (Encouragement):** Women in this group received a personalized introduction and mock call into the service plus a promotional calendar to serve as a reminder for how to use it and its benefits. They also received text messages and phone calls over the course of the intervention reminding and incentivizing them to use the free service.
- **No Intervention (Comparison):** Women in this group did not receive any intervention but could continue to call in and access the free service.

The encouragements significantly increased women's use of Viamo's call-in services. While only 20 percent of the comparison group ever called the service (with 4 calls on average), 84 percent of women who received the encouragements called the service (with 31 calls on average). Exposure to the platform significantly increased sexual and reproductive health knowledge, intake of iron supplements in pregnancy, and intention to use modern contraception in the future. Women who received the encouragements frequently discussed content with friends and family, which contributed to knowledge being spread naturally from women calling the service to other women in the same communities.

## RESEARCHERS

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## PARTNERS

Viamo (Implementer), Innovations for Poverty Action (Research Partner), Ministry of Health Uganda, Peripheral Vision International (Content Development), MBN (Fieldwork; Biomarkers), University of Basel and Swiss Topical and Public Health Institute (Swiss TPH)

## DONOR

USAID (Development Innovation Ventures)

## COUNTRY

Uganda

## SECTOR

Health & Nutrition

## STUDY TYPE

Randomized Evaluation (RCT)

## SAMPLE

6,011 pregnant and recently pregnant women

## TIMELINE

2022-2024