FATHERS' PERCEPTIONS AND EXPERIENCES DURING CARE OF SPOUSES WHO DEVELOPED CHILDBIRTH COMPLICATIONS IN UGANDA

D. Kaye¹, O. Kakaire¹, S. Mbalinda², N. Kakande³, M. Osinde⁴

¹. Makerere University, Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology, Kampala, Uganda
². Department of Nursing, Makerere University, Kampala, Uganda
³. Joint Clinical Research Centre, Kampala, Uganda
⁴. Jinja Regional Referral Hospital, Jinja, Uganda

Development of appropriate interventions to increase male involvement in childbirth is vital to strategies to improve health outcomes, particularly for women with obstetric complications. The objective was explore men’s perceptions and experiences regarding their involvement, so as to generate information that will inform interventions aimed at increasing men’s involvement.

Methods
We conducted 20 in-depth interviews with “fathers” who came to the hospital to attend to their spouses/partners who had been admitted to Mulago National referral hospital. The objective was to obtain detailed descriptions of what the fathers’ experiences, their perception of an ideal “father”, the challenges in achieving this ideal status and proposed solutions.

Results
The “fathers” identified themselves as the biological father, the partner’ or the spouse of the pregnant woman. The ideal father was described as available, easily-reached, accessible and considerate. Most “fathers” were willing to learn about the pregnancy and childbirth and to support their partners/wives/spouses at this time, but identified personal, relationship, family and community barriers. Fathers struggle in reconciling work-related and families needs, often withdrawing into their traditional roles. The fathers found the health system, including healthcare providers unwelcoming, intimidating, and unsupportive. Suggestions to improve fathers’ roles in childbirth include creating more awareness for fathers, male-targeted antenatal education and support, and changing provider attitudes.

Conclusions
Personal, family, societal and health system factors play a role in promoting or impeding involvement of fathers in women’s health issues during pregnancy and childbirth. Many fathers experience distress from the unwelcome environment in hospital.