

# So That My Wife Can Work More Comfortably

## Sharing Responsibilities in Family Planning with Vasectomies in North Sulawesi

### Presenter

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Everything was tried. From things inserted in the body, to things that had to be swallowed every day, almost all of the contraception methods had been tried by Ayu Djamir. But not one was right for her body. The last contraceptive she tried, the pill, made her skinny, nauseous, and gave her a period that lasted 21 days.

Silently, her husband, Ismail Husen (43) began to be concerned, "I felt pity seeing my wife. It was better for me to find a family planning solution." After asking everywhere, including consulting with a number of doctors, in August 2007 he spent 4 million rupiah (although there have been cases of the Family Planning Coordinating Agency supporting some costs). Ismail underwent the procedure he had chosen, a vasectomy. It's certain that Regina Alfi Husen (3years old), his fifth child, will have no younger siblings.

Unlike Ayu Djamir, millions of women are still trapped by contraception. As is known, the responsibility of ensuring men can continue their activities but that the youngest child has no more younger siblings, lies solely with the wives. Ismail hopes to change this view.

Ismail then encouraged the people of his village, Arakan, in Tatapaaan sub-district, Minahasa Selatan district, North Sulawesi, to get vasectomies as well. Some were interested. Many were hesitant and believed their sexual desire would decrease, or even worse, that their erections would suffer or even disappear completely. "That is not true," said Ismail, smiling.

To realize the desire of a number of people to get vasectomies, Ismail endeavored to bring the North Family Planning Coordinating Agency to the village. Since 2008, this agency planned to have a free vasectomy program. Today, 32 men in Arakan village have had vasectomies. Almost 10% of the total North Sulawesi population has used this service, 346 in 2008 and 106 in 2009 (up to July 2009).

The vasectomy movement does not only involve the North Sulawesi Family Planning Coordinating Agency (BKKBN) alone. "We pay for the facility, doctors and nurses for the operation. The medicine costs are borne by the BKKBN," said dr Anton Rumambi, the deputy head of Wolter Monginsidi Hospital. Citizens who wish to get a vasectomy only have to come to the SUSI Clinic, which is an Indonesia acronym that stands for Husbands Care for Their Wives, every Tuesday and Friday. "Therefore the program is named Selaju (Selasa and Jumat or Tuesday and Friday). I feel that every hospital in Indonesia, private or public, can provide free vasectomy services," he added.

Swara Parangpuan, a non government organization that focuses on women's issues and Ismail's workplace, contributed a lot to socialization and organization efforts. In Arakan village a Fishermen and Farmers Family Planning Group was formed called "Anuke Simemon", which means Jointly Owned. Today (July 2009) the members number 51, of which 32 have had vasectomies. The remainder feels more comfortable using condoms.

In addition, support from religious leaders, Muslim and Christian, was also very helpful. Acceptance of vasectomy by religious leaders as a method of birth control for husbands and wives, ensured the community didn't have any doubts about the procedure from a religious teaching perspective.

The success of vasectomies in Arakan is a ray of hope that family planning in men's groups can be as popular as it is in women's groups. As an incentive for success, BKKBN North Sulawesi provided health services and productive economic stimulus funds for Increased Income for Prosperous Families Enterprises in Arakan. "Of course, it would be very meaningful if the experience in Arakan village could be replicated in other villages throughout Indonesia," said Mieke S Sangian, the head of North Sulawesi BKKBN.

For the women, the benefits of vasectomies were instantly felt. "When I was getting injections my stomach hurt. But now, no longer as my husband got a vasectomy," said Salma (45 years old). Ati (36 years old) also agreed, "Since my husband got a vasectomy, my menstruation is normal. Before, with the injection, I'd only have a period every three months."

The family economies of the Arakan inhabitants, who are mostly farmers and fishermen with low incomes, are also getting better. "Now, my husband doesn't need to spend any money on injection. I also have more energy and can help my husband because I no longer feel sick," said Ati. This was echoed by Hamzah (52 years old), "My wife's work in selling dried fish around the villages is not interrupted anymore because she's no longer sick. Our children's futures are safer."  
"What else is there? It's time for men to get vasectomies en masse so that our wives are healthier and can work more comfortably."

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