

## **Exploring relationships between gender attitudes, couple concordance and family planning in Tanzania**

### **Background**

Gender norms and power dynamics between men and women are likely to have an influence on contraceptive use. Previous research suggests a complex relationship between contraceptive use, couple communication around family planning (FP), and perceptions of spousal approval of FP. A multi-country comparative report on couples data from Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS) in 10 sub-Saharan African countries showed a strong positive association in most countries between joint partner approval of FP (meaning both partners reported that they approved of FP), discussion of FP matters, and wife's education, but the findings also showed that the independent effect of discussion of FP between spouses on the wife's use of modern contraceptive methods was stronger than that of joint approval of FP<sup>i</sup>. A 2004 study comparing DHS data from 21 sub-Saharan African countries found that, in every country, the proportion of women correctly reporting their spouse's disapproval of contraception was smaller among those who had discussed FP with their husband than among those who had never discussed FP with their husband<sup>ii</sup>. While there is less research on the relationship between couple communication and joint approval of FP on actual uptake of contraception (and the direction of causality), a secondary analysis of survey and focus group data from the 1995-96 Negotiating Reproductive Outcomes study in Uganda found that perceived partner opposition caused a significant increase in unmet need reported by wives and a shift in contraceptive mix favoring use of traditional methods over modern methods<sup>iii</sup>. Additionally, results of the Malawi Male Motivator Project showed that an intervention designed to motivate men to discuss FP with their wives resulted in significant increases in FP uptake.<sup>iv</sup>

Gender inequality tends to correlate with nonuse of contraception, and it is often assumed that gender equitable attitudes are conducive to family planning. Direct research evidence of the latter is scarce, but there is a growing body of suggestive evidence regarding the role of gender equitable attitudes in predicting reproductive and sexual behaviors,<sup>v-vii</sup> including contraceptive use<sup>iv; viii-ix</sup>. In this paper we will explore three measures of couple concordance as they relate to contraceptive use in peri-urban regions of Tanzania: couple communication about FP, perceived spousal approval of FP, and relative scores on the Gender Equitable Men (GEM) Scale, a scale measuring the degree of equity in attitudes related to gender attributes and relationships.

### **Setting**

This dataset is drawn from a study on the effectiveness of a radio campaign to improve FP uptake and gender equitable attitudes. The study is being conducted in two regions of Tanzania, Mwanza in the northwest and Dodoma in the central part of the country. Modern method contraceptive use according to the 2010 Demographic and Health survey was 11.7% in Mwanza and 27.1% in Dodoma, compared to 27.4% nationally. As this is a study of the effectiveness of radio campaigns, sites were chosen based on the availability of local radio and the presence of

community based contraceptive distributors (CBDs) employed by T-MARC, a social marketing company whose services are being promoted in the radio advertisements. The interventions in the two sites and findings from pre/post surveys will be described in subsequent papers.

## **Methods**

A baseline household survey was completed in December 2009. The survey included 200 couples ages 15-44 from the two areas (Dodoma, Mwanza). The survey measured gender attitudes of both members of the couples using the GEM Scale, as well as FP knowledge and use, perceptions of one's spouse's approval or disapproval of FP, and discussions of FP with one's spouse.

## **Analysis**

Three separate logistic regression analyses were carried out to determine the following:

- The effect of couple concordance in gender attitudes on women's reported contraceptive use (after controlling for women's sociodemographic variables)
- The effect of couple concordance in perceptions of spousal approval of family planning on women's reported contraceptive use (after controlling for women's sociodemographic variables)
- The effect of couple concordance on spousal communication about family planning on women's reported contraceptive use (after controlling for women's sociodemographic variables)

As noted above, the dependent variable was women's reported use of any contraceptive method. Covariates included education, religion, age, region and number of living children.

## **Results**

The findings suggest that couples who are congruent in having gender-equitable attitudes are more likely to use contraception (based on wife's report) than couples in which both members have less equitable attitudes (OR = 2.8,  $p < .05$ ). On the other hand, couples in which one member only expresses gender equitable attitudes were no more likely to use contraception than couples in which both members have less equitable attitudes. Regarding spousal approval of FP, couples who both perceive that the other approves of FP are more likely to use contraception than couples who disagree (or don't know) about the other's approval of family planning (OR = 2.5,  $p < .01$ ). Finally, couples who both report that they had discussions about FP more than once in the last three months are significantly more likely to use contraception than couples in which both members agree that they have discussed family planning less than once in the past three months (OR = 2.1;  $p < .05$ ).

## **Discussion**

Our findings are consistent with those of Luke, et al. (2007), who found that an association between husbands' gender attitudes and their violence against their wives depended on the level of equity in their wives attitudes. The lesser risk of violence against wives when husbands' attitudes were more gender equitable was more pronounced when the wives also expressed gender equitable attitudes. The finding that both spouses' attitudes and perceptions matter, and that consistency matters, suggests that interventions designed to influence what goes on within couples—be it domestic violence or family planning—should include both members of the couple. Surprisingly, this is often not the case. Our findings also suggest that reducing gender inequality and encouraging couple communication will be conducive to the practice of FP.

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<sup>i</sup> Gebreselassie, T & V Minod. 2007. *Spousal Agreement on Family Planning in Sub-Saharan Africa*. DHS Analytic Reports: 11. MACRO International, Inc: Calverton, MD.

<sup>ii</sup> DeRose, L, N Dodoo, A Ezech, & T Owuor. 2004. "Does Discussion of Family Planning Improve Knowledge of Partner's Attitudes Toward Contraceptives?" *International Family Planning Perspectives*, 30:2, 87-93.

<sup>iii</sup> Wolff, B, A Blanc, & J Ssekamatte-Ssebuliba. 2000. "The Role of Couple Negotiation in Unmet Need for Contraception and the Decision to Stop Childbearing in Uganda," *Studies in Family Planning*, 31:2, 124-137.

<sup>iv</sup> Shattuck, D, B Kerner, K Gilles, M Hartmann, T Ng'ombe, & G Guest. 2011. "Encouraging Contraceptive Uptake by Motivating Men to Communicate About Family Planning: The Malawi Male Motivator Project," *American Journal of Public Health*, 101: 6, 1089-1095.

<sup>v</sup> Latka, M A Meyer-Weitz, K Filding, P Kruger, T Mogwere, & G Churchyard. 2009. "Factors associated with concurrent sexual partnering and condom use are not the same: Results from a representative household survey in Rustenburg, South Africa," poster presentation at the *Fourth South Africa Aids Conference*.

<sup>vi</sup> Luke, N, S Schuler, B Thi Thanh Mai, P Vu Thien, & T Hung Minh. 2007. "Exploring Couple Attributes and Attitudes and Marital Violence in Vietnam," *Violence Against Women*, 13:1, 5-27.

<sup>vii</sup> Pulerwitz, J & G Barker. 2008. "Measuring Attitudes toward Gender Norms among Young Men in Brazil," *Men and Masculinities*, 10:3, 322-338.

<sup>viii</sup> Schuler, S, S Hashemi, & A Riley. 1997. "The influence of changing roles and status in Bangladesh's fertility transition: Evidence from a study of credit programs and contraceptive use," *World Development*, 25:4, 563-575.

<sup>ix</sup> Waszak, C, J Severy, L Kafafi, & I Badawi. 2000. "Fertility behavior and psychological stress: The mediating influence of gender norm beliefs among Egyptian women," *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 25, 197-208.