



**African Population and
Health Research Center**

Women's empowerment and family planning in sub-Saharan Africa: Review of the literature

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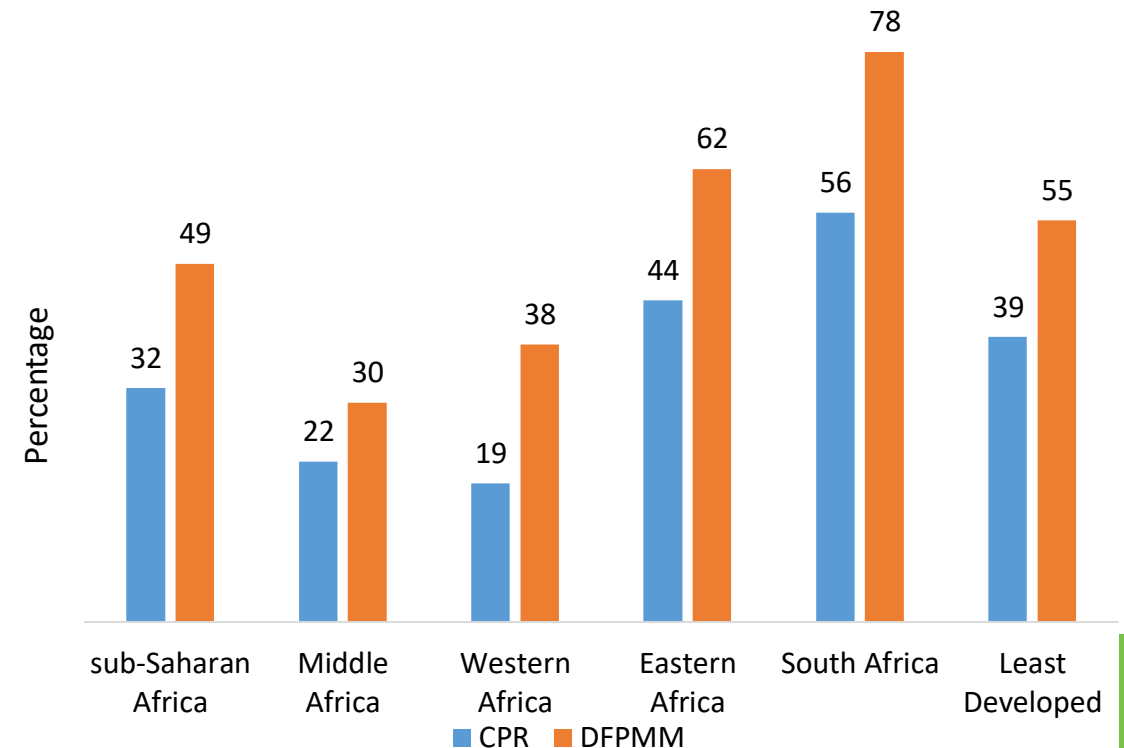
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Family planning (FP) in sub-Saharan Africa

- FP is key to unlocking the SDGs: health, gender equality, environmental sustainability.....
- **SDG 5.6** - universal access to SRHR as agreed in accordance with the POA (ICPD) and the Beijing Platform for Action.
- Despite improvements, unmet need for FP/SRH remains high.
- About one in four women in SSA have unmet need for contraception.

Contraceptive use (CPR) and demand for FP satisfied by modern methods (DFPMM)



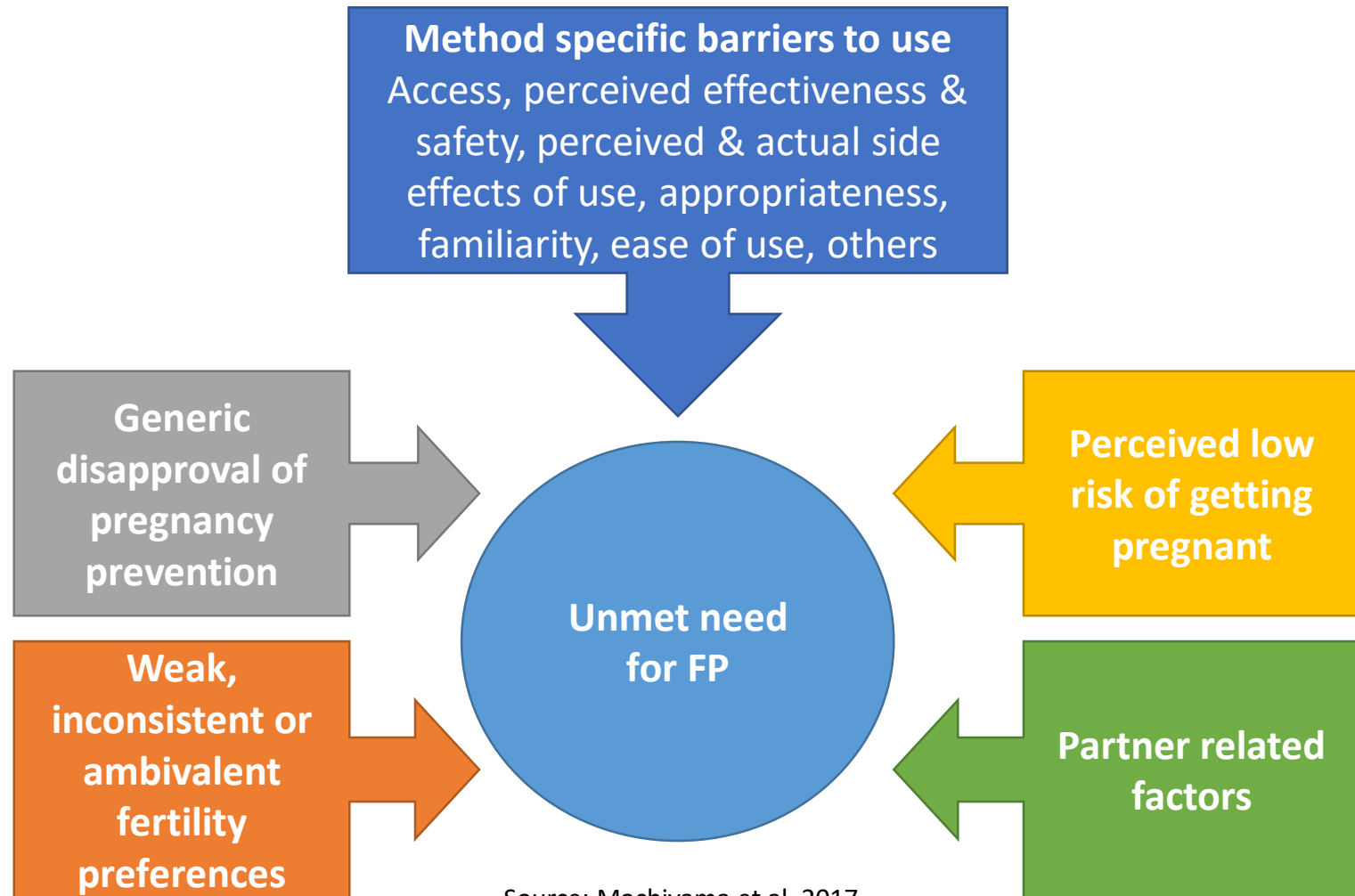
Source: PRB, 2020

What is the link between women's empowerment and FP?

Gender inequalities remain a significant barrier to addressing unmet SRH needs

- Social and cultural norms encourage large family size, early marriage....
- Partner & significant other's opposition to contraception
- Low male engagement and low use of male contraceptive methods.
- Lack of informed choice leading to method related beliefs/ concerns

Causal framework for the reasons for unmet need for FP



Conceptualizing empowerment

- “The expansion of people’s ability to make strategic life choices in a context where this ability was previously denied to them”. (Kabeer, 1999).
- “The process of enhancing of individuals or group’s capacity to make purposive choices and to transform those choices into desired actions and outcomes” (World Bank,2005)
- Elements of empowerment: **process of change, agency, resources and achievements**
- New model by the BMGF - **power, voice and choice**
- Multi-dimensional, multi-level and difficult to measure.

Dimensions of women's empowerment

Dimension	Description (household level)
Economic	Women's control over income; access to and control of family resources
Socio-cultural	Women's freedom of movement; lack of discrimination against daughters
Familial/ Interpersonal	Participation in domestic decision-making; control over sexual relations;; freedom from domestic violence
Legal	Knowledge of legal rights; domestic support for exercising rights
Political	Knowledge of political system and means of access to it;; exercising the right to vote
Psychological	Self-esteem; self-efficacy; psychological well-being

Domains of women empowerment measured

- **Aggregate (national) measures of gender equity**

- gender inequality index
- gender empowerment index

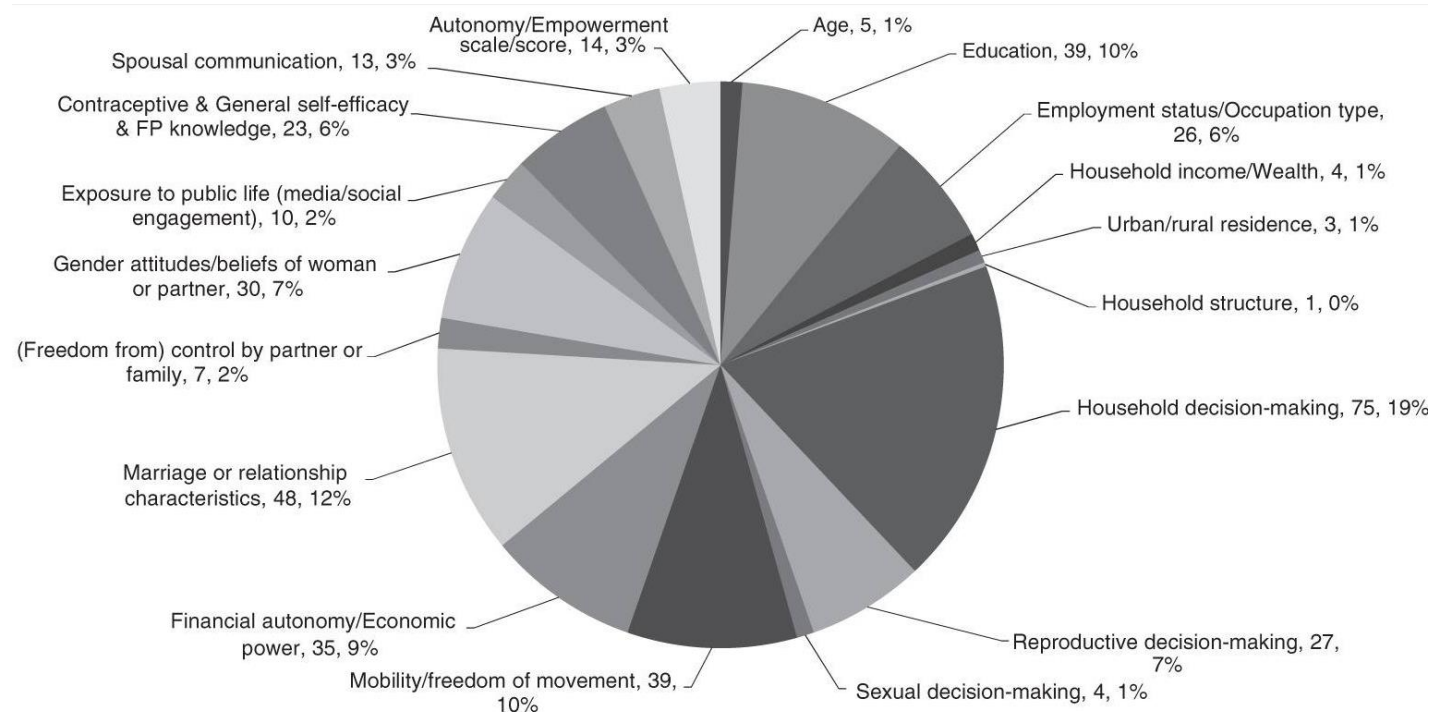
- **Traditional measures of women status**

- education
- employment
- income
- age & age difference with partner

- **Measures of empowerment**

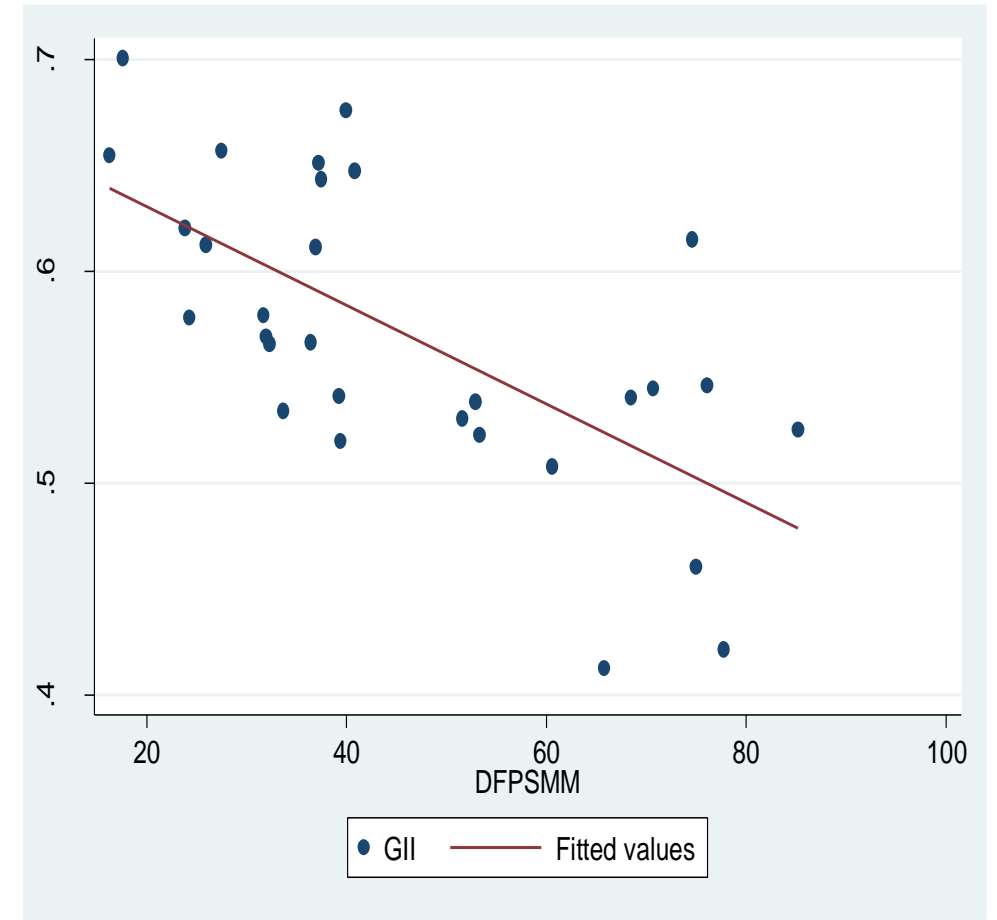
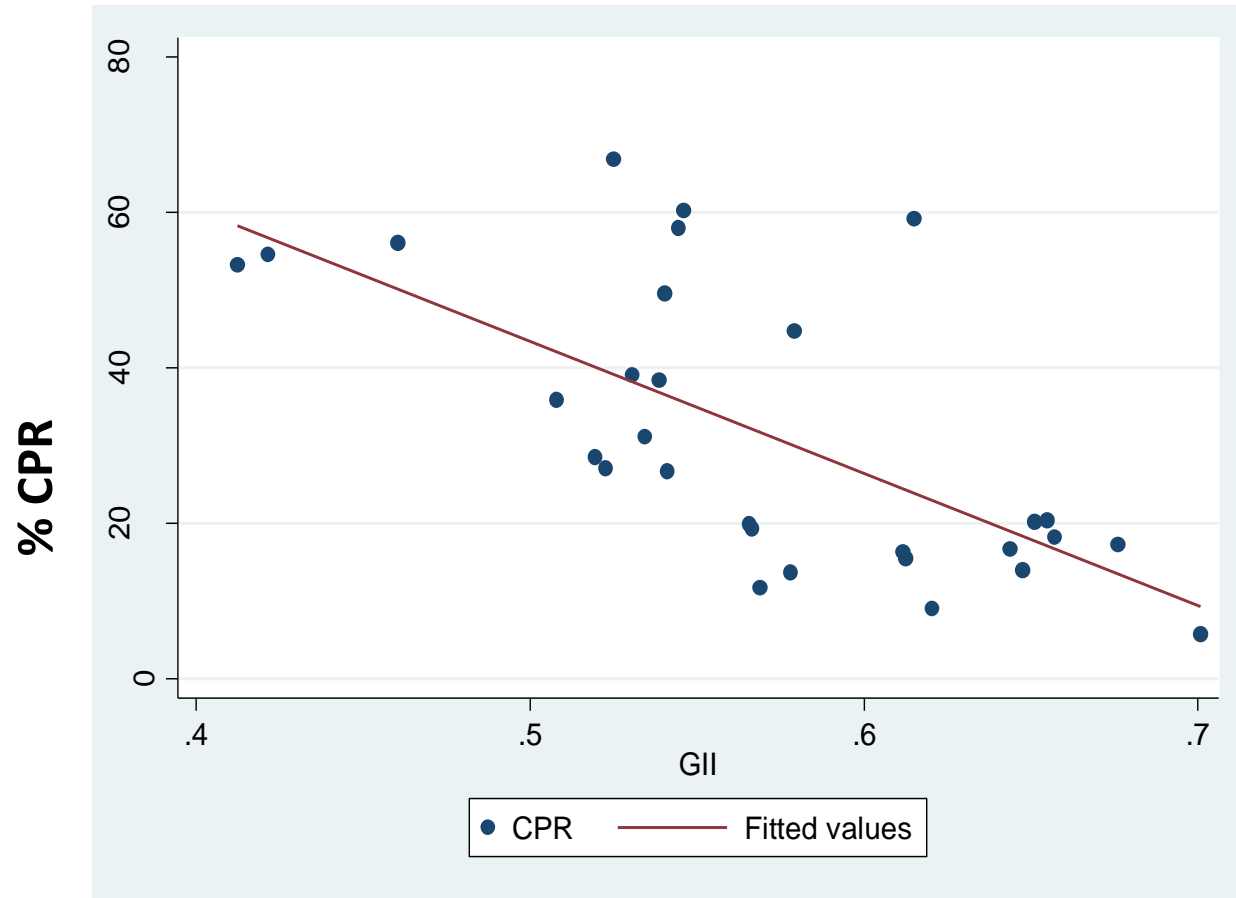
- decision making (household and reproductive)
- attitudes towards violence
- financial autonomy/asset ownership
- knowledge level (social independence)

Domains of empowerment in studies examining associations between empowerment and FP



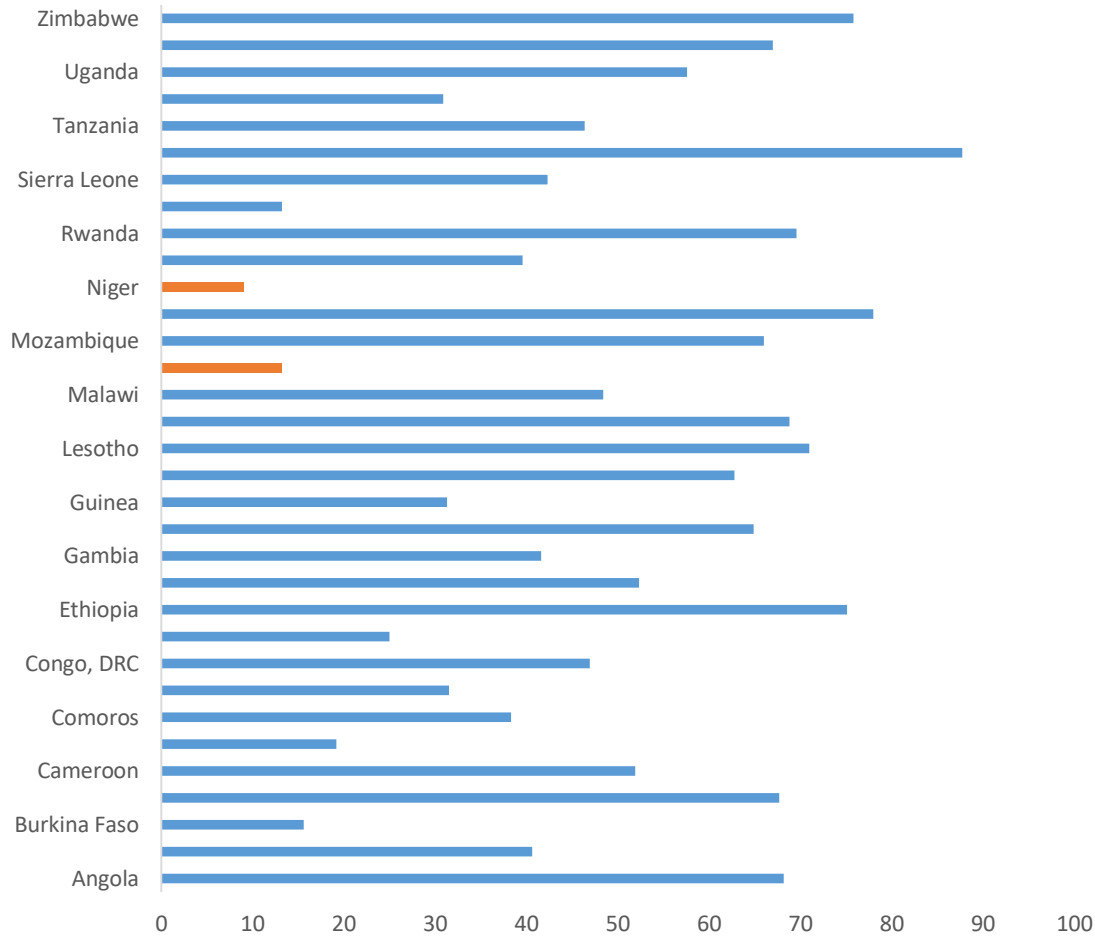
Source: Prata et al, 2017

Correlation between Gender Inequality Index and FP



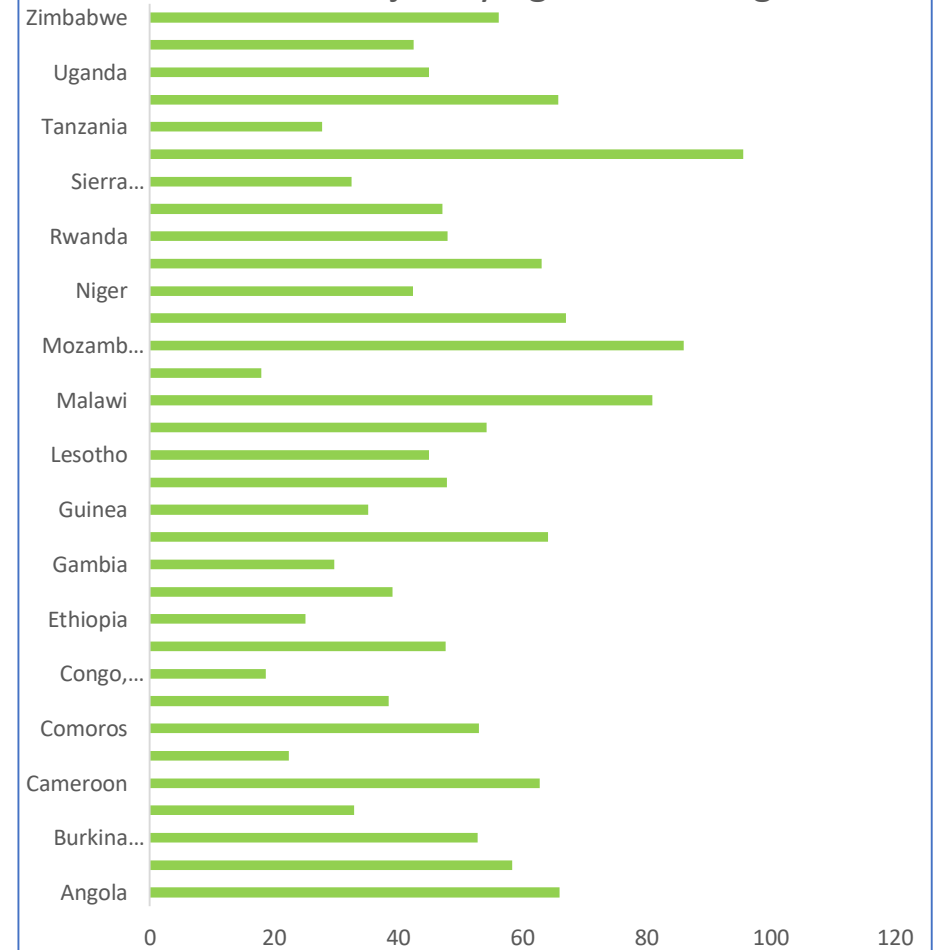
Indicators of women's empowerment (DHS)

Married women participating in all three decisions



% participating in all decisions

Married women who disagree with all the reasons justifying wife beating



% rejecting all reasons for wife beating

Studies on women's empowerment & FP

Authors	Data source	Domains of emp. measured	Outcomes	Major findings
Prata et al,2017	Literature review of 46 articles (1990-2012), only 14 studies from Africa	Household decision-making, mobility	contraceptive use and unmet need for contraception	<p>Relationship between women empowerment and FP - complex, with mixed positive and null associations.</p> <p>Consistently positive associations observed but for fewer than half of the studies.</p>
Ahmed et al,2010	<p>DHS data from 33 countries (19 from SSA)</p> <p>Pooled meta analysis</p>	Economic Status, Education and decision making autonomy	Contraceptive use & maternal health	<p>Positive and significant effect on contraceptive use in 8 out of 19 SSA countries</p> <p>Women with the higher empowerment score more likely to use modern contraception</p>

Studies on women's empowerment & FP

Authors	Data source	Domains of empowerment	Outcomes	Major findings
Wang et al, 2013	DHS data from Rwanda (2010)	Women's participation in decisions around family planning (community level)	Contraceptive use	Women's participation in decisions around family planning has a positive effect on individual women's contraceptive use
Do & Kurimoto, 2012	DHS data from 5 countries in Africa	Composite index of empowerment constructed from six dimensions	Current contraceptive use	strong association between the overall score of women's empowerment and contraceptive use in all countries
Larsson & Stanfors, 2014	DHS data from 4 countries in SSA	Women's attitudes towards wife beating Education and exposure to media	Contraceptive use	Rejecting wife beating was positively associated with contraceptive use in two of the 4 countries Women's education was significant in 3 countries.

Studies on women's empowerment & FP

Authors	Data source	Domains of empowerment	Outcomes	Major findings
Ewerling et al. 2017	DHS data from 34 countries in SSA	three dimensions of WE (attitude to violence, social independence, and decision making)	Modern contraceptive use & maternal health services	Attitude to violence and decision making more consistently associated with the use of modern contraception
Yaya et al, 2018	DHS data from 32 SSA countries	Women's labor force participation, attitudes towards wife beating, decision making and knowledge level	Ever use of Contraceptives	Decision making autonomy and labor force participation were positively associated with contraceptive use in almost all countries
	HDI data from UNDP	HDI		Higher contraceptive use among countries with moderate HDI

Studies on covert use of FP

Authors	Data source & analysis	Domains of emp. measured	Outcomes	Major findings
Kibira et al, 2020	Qualitative study of covert use in three countries in SSA	Reasons for covert use, challenges and consequences of disclosure	Contraceptive use	Reason: tensions within relationships or to keep peace within the home. Challenges: lack of financial and social support, and suspicions surrounding delayed fertility and contraceptive-related side effects
Choiriyyah & Becker, 2018	DHS data from 21 countries (14 SSA)	Improved method to estimate covert use, comparing direct & indirect estimates	Covert use of contraception	2%-15% of women in the 14 countries reported covert use by the direct method, while this ranges from 10%-69% using the indirect question.
Akoth et al. (under review)	Data from latest two rounds of PMA, Kenya	Prevalence and determinates of covert use of contraception	Covert use of contraception	12.2% of women; covert use higher among older women (35-49 years) and the poor. Injectables (53.3%) and implants (34.6%) were the commonest methods used covertly.

Summary

- Challenges of conceptualizing empowerment, measurement and indicators
- Limited qualitative studies to understand what empowerment means in different contexts
- Studies based on large national surveys (DHS) largely showed mixed positive and null associations between empowerment and contraceptive use
- Transforming gender relations to be more equitable, for improved health outcomes for both women and men.
- Focus on interventions that promote gender equality in FP, including male engagement and need for gender transformative programming with men.



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