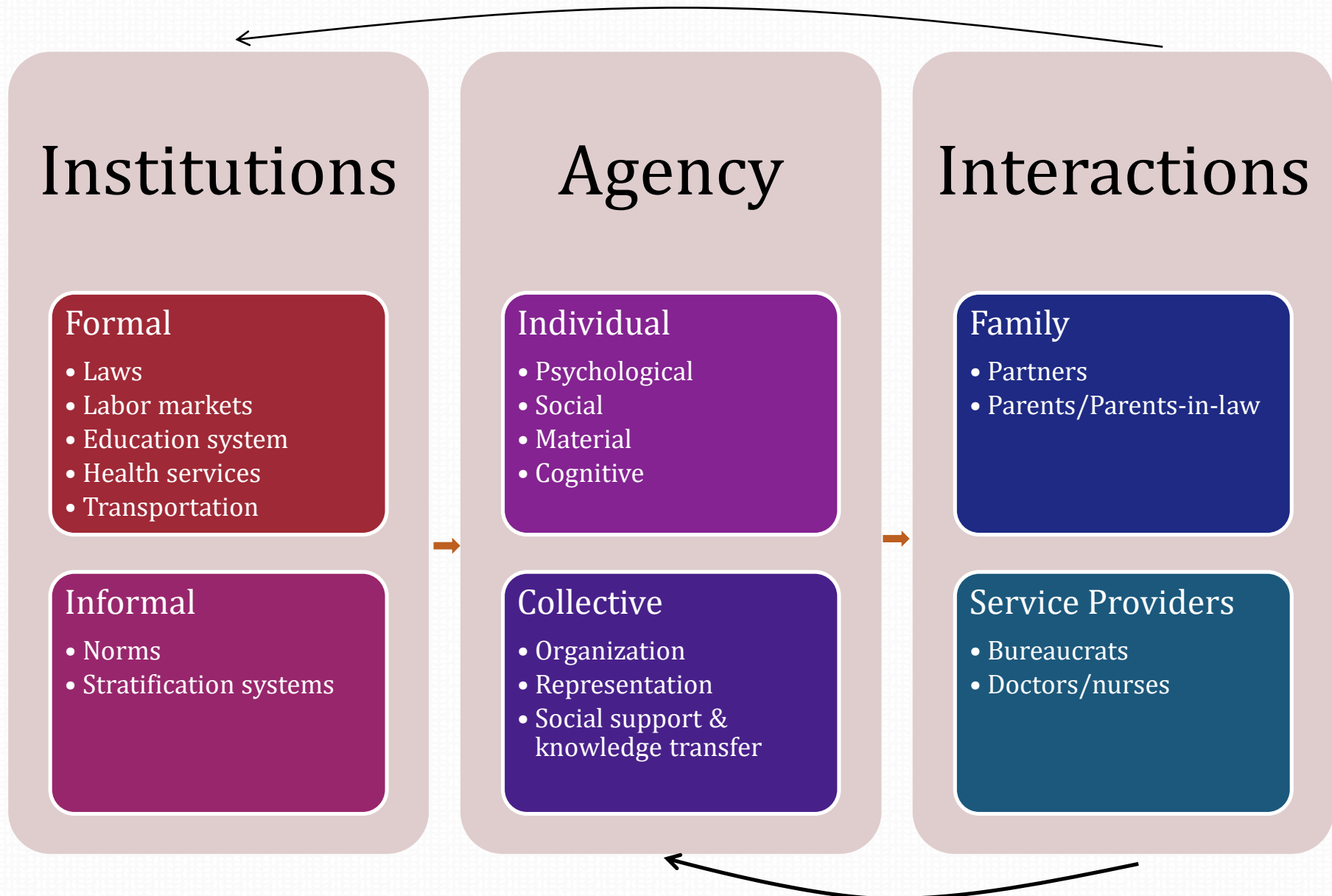




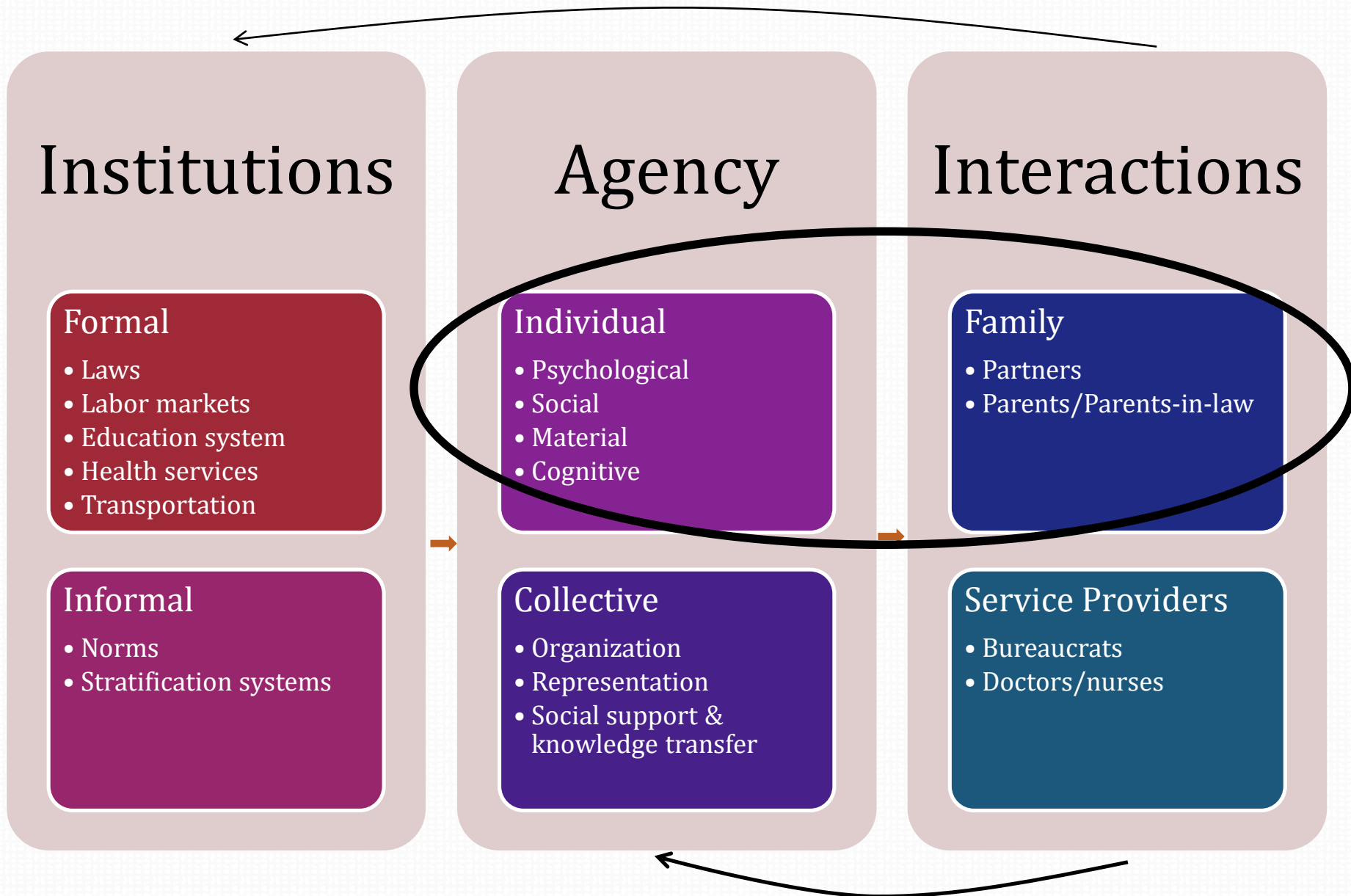
Measuring Women's Empowerment in the Context of Family Planning

Sonalde Desai, University of Maryland and
National Council of Applied Economic Research (New Delhi)

Building blocks of linkages



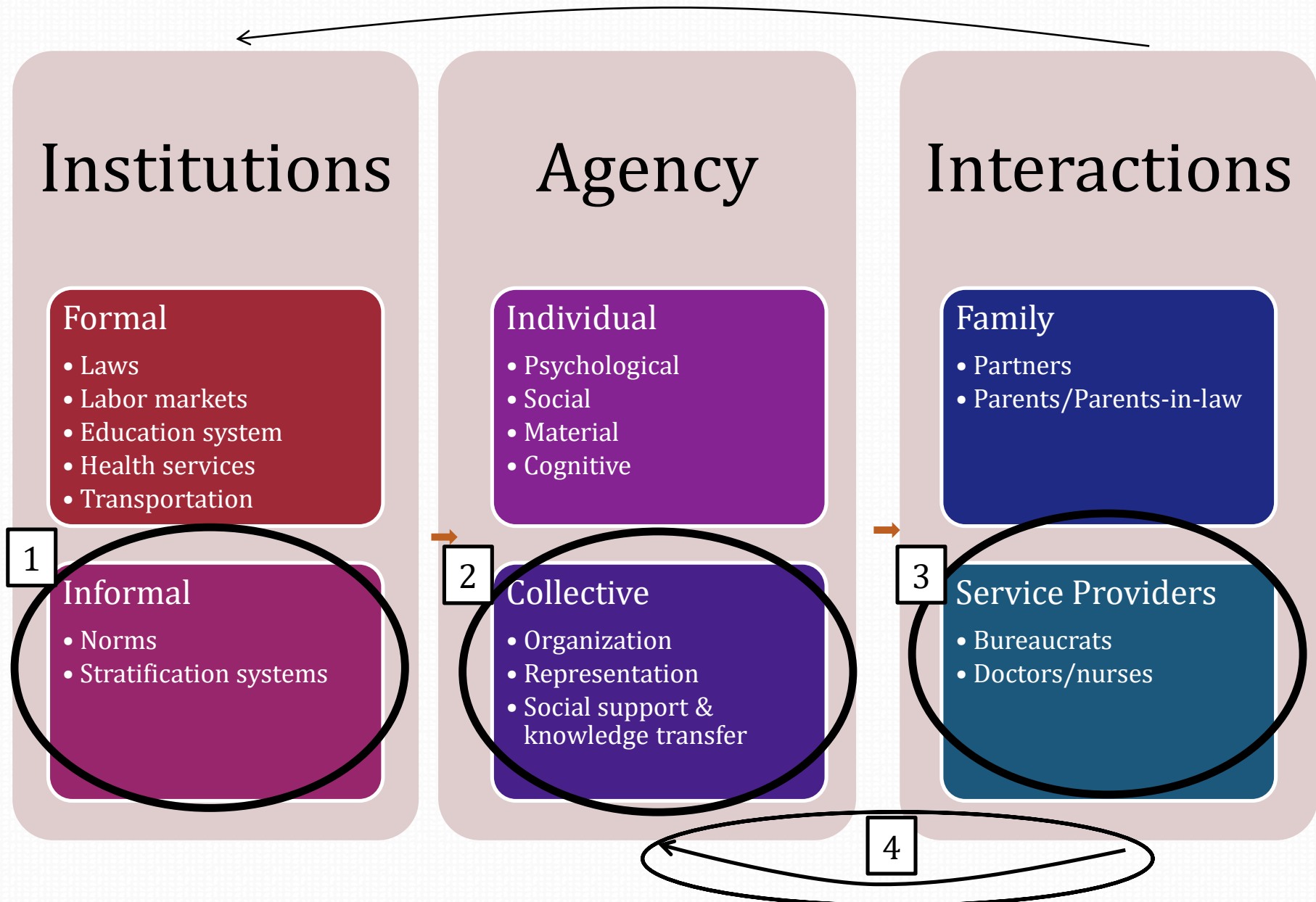
Dominant theme in the literature



Have data, will study

- Individual level data on different markers of gender empowerment and fertility preferences/contraceptive use have driven our research
- Welcome but fledgling attempts at expansion include:
 - Expansion of dimensions on which women's agency is measured
 - Self-efficacy
 - Gender attitudes
 - Linking social institutions to individual agency:
 - Access to paid work
 - Land ownership
 - Financial inclusion

What is missing?



Key challenges in Measuring Empowerment



1

Empowerment variation
Between individuals or
communities?

Measuring informal
institutions, e.g.
norms



2

Whose agency?
Individuals vs. collectives

Measurement of
collective agency.



3

Power vis-à-vis whom?
Families vs. systems

Measuring interactions
with providers and
systems outside the
family



4

Stability vs. change

Longitudinal data on
empowerment and
reciprocal influences

Social norms vs. individual traits

Empowerment Measure	Community only	Individual variables	Full Model
Economic decision making scale	0.45**	0.34**	0.50**
Family size decision making	0.22**	0.12**	0.22**
Freedom of movement scale	0.40**	0.17**	0.42**
Afraid to disagree with husband	0.12**	0.03**	0.13**
Husband beats wife	0.08**	0.07**	0.12**

Results from 5 Asian country study by Karen Mason and colleagues. Far greater variation between communities than between individuals. Results show that about 40-80% of intercommunity variation in markers of empowerment can be explained by aggregation of community responses without including any individual traits. As Mason (2000) notes, “these results are consistent with the assumption that empowerment is a group based [rather than individual] process”.

But aggregation is not very satisfactory from a substantive or policy perspective

1. Social norms as an attribute of community vs. attribute of individuals

- In most situations it is difficult (if not impossible) to measure attributes of a community.
 - But even when collecting data from individuals, it may be possible to measure “Socially shared definitions of the way people do behave and should behave,” Paluck and Shepherd (2012)
 - Measurement of social norms often relies on measurement of individual attitudes:
 - In your opinion, is a husband justified in hitting or beating his wife in the following situations.... (common question in many DHS surveys)
- Vs.
- How many people in your community would think it normal for a man to beat his wife in the following situations...
 - If a man failed to punish his wife in the following situations, he would lose respect in your community ...

2. Collective vs. individual agency

- We have focused on individual agency through measurement of:
 - Self-efficacy
 - Intra-household decision making power
 - Physical mobility
- But as development studies literature notes, in some situations collective agency may be more relevant
- For family planning research some relevant measures may be
 - Participation in self-help groups (Schuler et al. 1997)
 - Community involvement in hiring health care workers
 - Social networks where attitudes regarding childbearing and contraception can be discussed and shared (Susan Watkins's work on women's "gossip" networks)
 - Community focused sex-education program (interesting work by T K Sundari Ravindran in Changanpattu)

3. Empowerment vis-à-vis family members vs. institutions

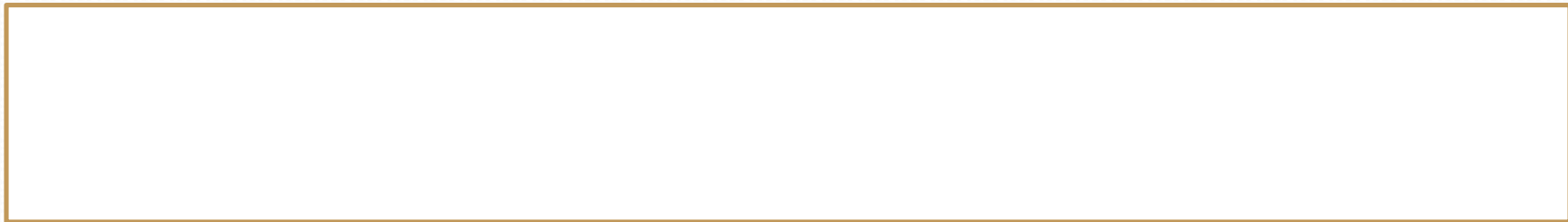
- Concept of empowerment intrinsically embodies the notion individuals and situations in which power is exercised
- Our individual based models focus on intra-household negotiations within which choices are exercised.
 - How large is the role of intra-household negotiations? Mason & Taj, (1987), Mason & Smith (2000) find men and women largely agree on fertility preferences.
- Agency in dealing with social institutions may be more relevant
- We need data about ability to negotiate health systems, shape women friendly SRH policies
 - To study this we need data on ability to overcome power imbalance with service providers and bureaucrats in areas such as:
 - Processes through which contraceptive access is negotiated with service provider (why sterilization and not IUD or pill?)
 - Resistance to or even understanding of openly or subtly coercive policies (e.g. subversion of one-child norm in China, negotiating provider resistance to offering abortion services)

4. Both empowerment and family planning are dynamic processes

- Excessive reliance on cross-sectional data forces us into viewing empowerment as a stable attribute of an individual and leaves little space for policy initiatives, including access to contraception, in increasing women's agency
- If we don't see individual fate as being written at birth or at least by age 18, we must think of it as changing over time and possibly changing in response to interactions around family planning
 - Substantial work on labor force participation/fertility dynamics in developed countries, less in developing countries
- But other aspects of gender empowerment usually only measured at a single time
- This would require us to collect data longitudinally on different aspects of women's empowerment as well as family planning to study topics like:
 - Growth in intra-household power following birth of a son
 - Ability to continue paid work with longer birth spacing
 - Child care constraints on community participation
 - Identification of key ages/life stages where interventions matter most

What I have ignored

- Variation between countries and cultures
- Variation within any given country



THANK YOU