

Extended Abstract

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Title: Household Bargaining and Other Relationship Differences between Contraceptives Users and Non-Users in Urban Ibadan, Nigeria.

Significance/background: Across the globe, spurred by forces such as industrialization and urbanization, marriage patterns are undergoing shifts. In modern economies, families are rapidly ceasing to be units of economic production. This can lead to weakening of ties among extended family members and a strengthening of the conjugal bond (Cherlin, 2012). In addition, the growing importance of individualism and the rise in the status of women are spurring further change to the institution of marriage (Wilcox & Nock, 2006). Burgess (1943) described these shifts as a transition from an “institutional” marriage based on traditional patriarchal authority, kinship and lineage systems to one based on “companionship.” Love, friendship and mutual respect are prominent aspects of companionship marriages. These marriages can be more egalitarian, with greater emphasis on communication and negotiation of mutual desires and goals between spouses, resulting in high quality marriages that are long lasting. Empirically the actual shifts in marriage patterns, in the west and across the globe, have been more complex than social theorists postulated. However, there is evidence to suggest that the ideation of the western family, with its emphasis on companionship and romantic love is spreading across the globe, even in settings with very little progress towards industrialization (Cherlin, 2012).

Main questions: However, while marital patterns are changing across the globe, there is less clarity on the different types of relationships that are emerging because of these shifts, especially in terms of power dynamics and emotional processes, and how these changes in intimate relationships influence reproductive decision-making and contraceptive use. Given these gaps, in this study, we explored the similarities and differences in marital relationships of contraceptive users and non-users across multiple domains such as time use, household decision-making including long-term financial planning, relationship quality and reproductive decision-making as well as attachment to traditional norms.

Methodology: The qualitative study was conducted in urban Ibadan, Nigeria, where we conducted in-depth interviews with 20 young couples, 10 users and 10 non-users. The female and male partners were interviewed separately, and female partner was 18-35 years old. The goal of the in-depth interviews was to illicit detailed information on their relationship in terms of its power dynamics, gender egalitarianism, relationship quality and contraceptive use decision-making.

Results/key findings: While there were many similarities between couples who used contraceptives and those that did not, there were interesting differences between the two groups, especially when it came to how the couples made their decisions, their orientation towards planning and preparing for the future, the ability of the woman to negotiate and bargain, level of intimacy and relationship quality as well as their attachment to traditional social norms in a rapidly changing environment. In general,

women and men in the contraceptive use group described a more systematic, planning-oriented and collaborative process of decision-making. The couples often formulated a household budget together, had an agreed upon prioritized list of items to spend on, and had a process in place to negotiate the best use of left-over funds, so as to maximize the best use of the family's resources. In terms of relationship quality, while the contraceptive users displayed more elevated levels of communication and trust as compared to the non-users, there were particularly interesting differences in the importance they placed on sexual intimacy within their marriages. While the contraceptive users seemed very concerned about maintaining a certain level of sexual intimacy within marriage, there was a tendency among non-users to downplay the role of sexual intimacy within marriage. Finally, the contraceptive users demonstrated more tenacity and willingness to adapt to changing economic realities in Nigeria, while the non-users were more attached to traditional roles and norms.

Knowledge contribution: This study provides critical and unique insight on how marriages processes and marital relationships of contraceptive users and non-users might be different, shedding light on key factors that enable couples to achieve their reproductive goals or alternately fail at achieving their goals. We get this insight from both the female partner, the male partner and the couple reporting jointly. While there is agreement on the need for family planning programs to engage couples, there is limited understanding on how to engage couples meaningfully without taking away woman's choice and freedom. Our study findings suggest that relationships with an egalitarian orientation, with more collaborative and consensus driven decision-making as well as those with higher levels of relationship quality are more likely to succeed in achieving their reproductive goals.