



Review

Women's empowerment and fertility: A review of the literature



Ushma D. Upadhyay^{a, g, *}, Jessica D. Gipson^{b, g}, Mellissa Withers^{c, g}, Shayna Lewis^e,
Erica J. Ciaraldi^b, Ashley Fraser^{d, g}, Megan J. Huchko^{f, g}, Ndola Prata^{d, g}

^a Advancing New Standards in Reproductive Health (ANSIRH), Bixby Center for Global Reproductive Health, Department of Obstetrics, Gynecology and Reproductive Sciences, University of California, San Francisco, 1330 Broadway, Suite 1100, Oakland, CA 94612, United States

^b Department of Community Health Sciences, Fielding School of Public Health, University of California, Los Angeles, 650 Charles E. Young Drive South, CHS 46-071B, Los Angeles, CA 90095-1772, United States

^c UCLA Center for the Study of Women, Box 957222, Public Affairs 1500, Los Angeles, CA 90095-7222, United States

^d Bixby Center for Population, Health and Sustainability, School of Public Health, University of California, Berkeley, 17 University Hall, Berkeley, CA 94720, United States

^e UCSF/UC Hastings Consortium on Law, Science and Health Policy, University of California Hastings College of the Law, 200 McAllister St., San Francisco, CA 94102, United States

^f San Francisco General Hospital, Department of Obstetrics, Gynecology and Reproductive Sciences, University of California, San Francisco, 50 Beale St, Suite 1200, San Francisco, CA 94105, United States

^g Women's Health & Empowerment Center of Expertise, University of California Global Health Institute, United States

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 1 November 2012

Received in revised form

31 May 2014

Accepted 10 June 2014

Available online 11 June 2014

Keywords:

Gender

Women's empowerment

Number of children

Ideal family size

Fertility

Birth spacing

Unintended pregnancy

Abortion

ABSTRACT

Women's empowerment has become a focal point for development efforts worldwide and there is a need for an updated, critical assessment of the existing evidence on women's empowerment and fertility. We conducted a literature review on studies examining the relationships between women's empowerment and several fertility-related topics. Among the 60 studies identified for this review, the majority were conducted in South Asia ($n = 35$) and used household decision-making as a measure of empowerment ($n = 37$). Overall, the vast majority of studies found some positive associations between women's empowerment and lower fertility, longer birth intervals, and lower rates of unintended pregnancy, but there was some variation in results. In many studies, results differed based on the measure of empowerment used, sociopolitical or gender environment, or sub-population studied. This article is one of the first evaluations of the literature assessing the relationships between women's empowerment and fertility. We identify several key issues that merit further investigation.

© 2014 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

Over the last two decades, women's empowerment has become a focus for development efforts worldwide. In 2000, 189 countries signed on to the eight Millennium Development Goals, which included a commitment to promoting gender equality and empowering women (MDG3) (United Nations, 2000).

Since then, several scholars have attempted to synthesize existing knowledge on women's empowerment and international development. In the only review that focused on reproductive-related outcomes, published over a decade ago, Blanc (2001) synthesized the research examining the role of gender-based power in sexual relationships and its impact on reproductive health. Malhotra et al. (2002) summarized the most promising methods to measure and analyze women's empowerment and provided a review of empirical studies from the fields of economics, sociology, anthropology, and demography. In 2008, Kishor and Subaiya (2008) provided data on the distribution and correlates of women's empowerment in 23 countries documenting the wide variation in levels of decision-making power and gender-equitable attitudes.

Recently, the World Bank devoted the World Development Report (2012) to the theme of Gender Equality and Development. The report argues that the success of global development efforts

* Corresponding author. Advancing New Standards in Reproductive Health (ANSIRH), Bixby Center for Global Reproductive Health, Department of Obstetrics, Gynecology and Reproductive Sciences, University of California, San Francisco, 1330 Broadway, Suite 1100, Oakland, CA 94612, United States.

E-mail addresses: upadhyayu@obgyn.ucsf.edu, ushma@jhu.edu (U.D. Upadhyay), jgipson@ucla.edu (J.D. Gipson), mellwit@yahoo.com (M. Withers), lewissh@uchastings.edu (S. Lewis), eciaraldi@ucla.edu (E.J. Ciaraldi), afrazer@berkeley.edu (A. Fraser), megan.huchko@ucsf.edu (M.J. Huchko), ndola@berkeley.edu (N. Prata).

hinges on gender equality and recommends public policies that promote gender equity as a means of ensuring economic growth.

At the same time that these efforts aimed to improve the status of women globally, support for family planning—an integral component in transforming women's lives—waned (Cleland et al., 2006; Crossette, 2005). The recent London Summit on Family Planning brought renewed attention to the importance of family planning as a means of reducing fertility and expanding the options available to women beyond reproduction (Carr et al., 2012).

This literature review builds on previous reviews of women's empowerment, by focusing specifically on research that examines its associations with fertility. To guide our work we use a definition and conceptualization of women's empowerment based on Kabeer's (1999; 2001): “the expansion of people's ability to make strategic life choices in a context where this ability was previously denied to them.” Within this definition, two central components of empowerment are the agency and the resources needed to exercise life choices. This definition allows a broader conceptualization than interpersonal sexual relationship power.

2. Methods

We conducted literature searches using PubMed, POPLINE, and Web of Science search engines in May 2013. Searches were conducted by using the following individual and combined keywords (and MeSH terms in PubMed): fertility, family size, ideal family size, birth intervals, birth/birth spacing, induced abortion, reproductive health, unplanned pregnancy, unintended pregnancy, parturition, birth, pregnancy, pregnancy spacing/intervals, and childbearing, published from January 1990 to December 2012. This initial search resulted in 6259 articles in PubMed, 3578 in POPLINE, and 4508 in Web of Science, for a total of 14,345 articles, including duplicates among the three databases (Fig. 1).

We evaluated each article against our inclusion criteria based on the title and abstract. To be included, studies must have: 1) been in English, 2) used quantitative analysis, 3) used observational or experimental study design, 4) analyzed data from low- or middle-income countries as defined by the World Bank, 5) examined one or more of the searched fertility topics, 6) examined “women's empowerment” either as an independent or dependent variable and described how it is measured. To meet the last criterion, an article had to include, either in its theoretical framework or stated research objective, the intention to examine women's empowerment, women's autonomy, women's status, or a closely related construct that fit within our definition of women's empowerment (Kabeer, 2001). Based on the research that demonstrates the distinction empirically (e.g., Hindin, 2000) and general theoretical consensus (Caldwell, 1986; Jejeebhoy, 1995; Mason, 1986), education may contribute to women's empowerment but is a distinct construct; therefore, studies that examined women's education or literacy in their own right were not included in this review. However, studies that conceptualized education as one form of empowerment, and/or used education as a proxy for empowerment were included. In order to limit the scope of this review, abstracts were further screened to exclude studies focused on the following topics: family planning and contraception (without also focusing on fertility), sexually transmitted infections, HIV/AIDS, and maternal, infant and child health. References from key articles were hand-searched to ensure that our review included all pertinent studies. This step allowed for the inclusion of book chapters, reports, and gray literature. This process resulted in 263 articles.

We then compiled a list of articles and abstracted data on the study design, study sample, measures of empowerment, independent variables, dependent variable(s), and results. This process eliminated 203 articles that did not meet the specified criteria, resulting in 60

reviewed articles. We first describe the measures of empowerment used in the studies. We then summarize the characteristics of the articles and synthesize the findings by topic. Dependent variables were considered positively associated with independent variables based on statistical tests conducted by the original authors at the significance level they determined. We conclude with a discussion of the ongoing challenges for the design, measurement and analysis of studies in this inherently complex area of investigation and make recommendations for future studies on empowerment and fertility.

3. Results

3.1. Measures of women's empowerment

We identified 19 domains of women's empowerment in the reviewed studies and for each, provided specific examples of how the studies operationalized empowerment (Table 1). While the majority of the 60 studies assessed empowerment across multiple domains, 4 studies examined only one domain. In over two-thirds ($n = 47$) of the studies, multidimensionality was determined through the use of composite or sum scores, indices, factor analysis and multi-item scales, while the remaining 17 studies used individual items to represent empowerment.

Women's participation in household decision-making was the most common measure of women's empowerment, used in 37 articles. Typically researchers created an index representing the number of household decisions in which a woman participates (e.g., decisions about personal healthcare, buying children's clothes, visiting relatives, and purchasing land). There was substantial variation in how these indices were developed. Some papers included decisions in which the woman has some say (joint or sole



Fig. 1. Flow chart of literature search.

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/952264>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/952264>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)