

# **MEN'S PERSPECTIVES OF ABORTION AND CONTRACEPTIVE USE**

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# The context of research on men in Africa

- There is a comparatively smaller amount of social science work, including that related to health.
- Governments and funders tend to set priorities for funding and support, wherein scholars wishing to pursue in-depth analyses are sidelined in both funding and promotion.
- Tools and methods applied in social science research, some with colonial roots, have been questioned and criticized.
- There is a dominance of binary, individualistic, and logical frames of understanding in existing social science work.



# The context of research on men in Africa

- Gender analyses often foreground male power advantage and a ‘bad man’ image, overshadowing contradictions and multiplicities in gender and masculinity.
- Social science work is also dominated by use of ‘categories of convenience’ (Davison, 1997). Consequently, concepts that reflect nuances of lives, systems and processes in Africa have barely been developed.
- There is limited attention to relational or micro-level dynamics.



# Background influences to men's perspectives of family planning and contraceptive use

- Two major relationships influence the role men may play in contraceptive use, namely
  - Men's ties to women as sexual partners and/or guardians
  - Men's connection to families as providers
- The ways men play their roles and seek to meet expectations affects their views and behavior towards contraceptives and family planning.
- The question is: What affects the ways men experience and execute their role expectations?



# Influences on men's practices and experience of masculinity...1

- Colonial labor mobilization strategies created the male provider role and related migration, thereby
  - Disempowering both men women economically
  - Emasculating men within communities and workplaces
  - Separating families
  - Leaving men unable to remit inadequately to their rural families
- Women in rural areas struggled to look after family amid increasing poverty and deteriorating land and landholdings
- Unmarried women, also left without economic security, were encouraged as official policy to settle on mines and farms to provide prostitution services to men. In principle, this would stabilize labor.
- Conditions favoring both extramarital and premarital sexual activity were thus created
- Both married and unmarried women would feel motivated to use contraceptives



# Influences on men's practices and experiences of masculinity...2

- Bride price got increasingly commercialized.
  - It has possibility become a source of income within monetized economies
  - It is potentially a source of prestige amid changing tastes and rising needs for luxury and accumulation
- Men engaged with prostitutes/other women in the workplace
  - Possibly compensating for lost masculinity?
- Increasingly, women's possibilities for sex outside and before marriage were wider, and sexuality for pleasure rather than procreation became more visible.



# Influences on men's practices and experiences of masculinity...2

- Men would worry about their own wives' sexuality in their absence.
- They similarly worried about their daughter's sexuality.
- Men thus felt pressured to remain visible in families, controlling members (wives and daughters' sexuality) even while migrating.
- They, however, would be constrained from effecting such control owing to mobility and perennial absence.



# What implications does this have to the picture of contemporary man?

- Most men experience a chronic sense of inadequacy.
- This is exacerbated by decreasing employment availability for men, and the role switch as more women start to earn.
- Men also present as struggling to fend for or monitor their families.
- Men are emasculated in their work settings and communities.
- This results in violence on self, family, and others forms of self-destructive behaviors.





# How then do men view and respond to contraceptive use and abortion?



# The data

- Were collected in a rural area in Zimbabwe
  - Focus group discussions and interviews with men, and women
  - Self-generated question with school youth (n= 546; 51% F)
  - (see Chikovore *et al.*, 2002; 2003 and 2009, from which quotes below are reproduced)



...She has destroyed my chances of enjoying *lobola* (bride price)... I supported her when she grew up. When she got ill, I used to run around with her... And then she does the unthinkable! ... **(elderly man, describing reaction if a daughter is pregnant before marriage)**

... when a boy and a girl have sex and pregnancy results.... her parents will expect that which is due to them. They say, 'Your son damaged my daughter, so what do you think we should do?' If I see that my son really has damaged another person's daughter, I should go to the girl's parents and pay so that our relations in the community are not disturbed... **(elderly man, on compensation following premarital pregnancy)**

... You will know that your daughter is now a *hure* (prostitute), getting pregnant without a husband...*Hure!* You already know this one has become a *hure*.... We shout at her.... 'Look, you have become a *hure*, isn't it? ...You do not have a husband, so you are a *hure!* ... We shout at her...'You are a *hure!*'...We really are mad... **(elderly man, also on premarital pregnancy)**

We ask her whose pregnancy it is. If she refuses to say, we beat her and tell her to go to *murume wake* ('husband')... There is no other way... You beat her so she moves to the home of the man who made her pregnant... That is where she should stay... **(young man, individual interview)**



The girl's mother tells her to go to *murume wake*... preferably before her father knows about it... because once he knows about the pregnancy, he for sure beats... he beats the mother...(middle-aged man, on violent response targeting family following premarital pregnancy)

... when she uses contraceptives, she is capable of preventing pregnancy... this can also prevent her from getting married... then she remains at home... so it will be difficult for you to keep on supporting a person (group laughter) who does not benefit you. As a father one hopes that his daughter will get married. Is it not so? And then she begins using pills... (unmarried young man in a focus group discussion describes why a girl must not use contraceptives before marriage)



People here do not favor prevention methods. That is not accepted at all. They think that by encouraging contraceptive use they also encourage a girl to become *hure*. Instead, we teach *komba* (initiation) in this community ... We teach our daughter that she is now grown up, and what we expect of her, but not that she should now obtain condoms [**middle-aged man, on why an unmarried girl must not use contraceptives**]

I would take them and throw them away or into a pit latrine [**unmarried men on response to seeing sister with contraceptives**]

You get hold of her and beat her up... so much so that she won't touch those pills... before marriage. Why should she use them? ... Without a husband! ... [**man describes response to unmarried girl who uses contraceptives**]

I would ask what she is doing with pills when she is not yet married. I, her brother, must use them because I am married. What would she know about pills when she is a mere schoolgirl and thus a virgin? [**man on contraceptive use by unmarried girls**]



# Men try to exercise control in spatially dispersed domains

‘When I come home . . . I open my house – you know it is my house – only to find those pills hidden. Then I ask myself, “What is this? I seem to recognize it? Oh, it is pills. What is the purpose of these pills? Oh, these are for family planning. So what should I do?” By the time my wife comes home, I have already discovered those pills. They are actually open and in use. Then I want to know why she was using them.’

‘. . . a woman is a woman. Even when you are around she can engage in those bad activities . . . As a man, you may go to work even for a period of say two weeks . . . and your wife then decides she also should do as you do while out there . . .’



# Conclusions

- Men's perspectives to contraceptive use, and double standards in their own, their children's, and their wives' sexuality appear contradictory.
- The anger directed at premarital pregnancy, sexuality, and contraceptive use, and at contraceptive use within marriage, is intense and somewhat disproportionate
  - Suggests a need to want to be recognized
  - Depicts men struggling to maintain vigilance and control in disparate spaces where they exist
  - Points to a sense of exclusion in different spaces among men, and a wish to reclaim lost space and prestige.
- Men's perspectives and behavior in family planning , contraceptive use and sexuality can , nonetheless, make sense when viewed with a gender/masculinity lens against a broader analytical frame.



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# Thank You !!

