

## Letter to the Editor relating to the paper *Young married women's perspectives on the motivation and dynamics for their husbands' opposition to their modern contraceptive use in Malawi* by Benjamin Kaneka and Akim J. Mturi

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This Letter is in response to the article by Kaneka and Mturi, "Young Married Women's Perceptions On The Meanings And Motivations For Their Husbands' Opposition To Their Modern Contraceptive Use In Malawi," published in this issue of Population Horizons (Vol 14. Issue 1). In this recently published article, the authors describe perceived reasons for male opposition to contraceptive use among young married women in Malawi. Participants were also questioned about the impact of partner opposition to contraceptive use on their own contraceptive behavior. Women's contraceptive behavior appeared to be largely responsive to the preferences of their partners, with a principal finding of the study being "that partner opposition was critical to young married women's reproductive and contraceptive decision making and practices" (page 4, first paragraph of right column).

In contrast to these findings, a study published in 2013 found that, in cases where women prefer fewer children than their partners, the discordant male preferences did not consistently dictate the contraceptive behavior of their partners. In sum, this study found that both males and females who perceived that their partner wanted fewer children than them were more likely to use contraception, compared to participants who perceived concordant fertility desires with their partner. Further, the study found that women who perceived their partner to want more children than they did were significantly more (not less) likely to use contraceptive, compared to women who perceived concordant fertility goals. These findings do not support the findings reported by Kaneka and Mturi in their 2017 publication.

It is not exceptional that the two studies reach different conclusions. The study from 2013 used quantitative data from urban Kenya while Kaneka and Mturi are using qualitative data from Malawi. In addition to the methodological differences in the collection of the data, the source population, and the time period, these two studies also had somewhat different aims; in the Kenya study, the authors sought to understand the degree of perceived partner discordance regard-

ing fertility preferences and whether a perceived discordance was associated with contraceptive use (or non-use) among female participants. In contrast, the recent Malawi study sought to understand the factors underlying male partner opposition to contraceptive use and also examined how this perceived opposition might influence the contraceptive behavior of participants. Bearing all of this in mind, I take no issue with the conflicting nature of the respective findings from the two studies and have no expectation that the authors of the Malawi investigation should uncover findings similar to the Kenya study.

However, I am concerned that Kaneka and Mturi have cited the 2013 Kenya publication in support of their findings. Specifically, in the introduction to their paper (page 2), they cite the Kenya study (among others) in support of the declaration that "... women who want no more children may not protect themselves from pregnancy because of their partner's desire to have additional children." The 2013 Kenya publication does not support this statement; instead it found that women who wanted fewer children than their partner were not less likely to use contraception compared to women with fertility goals matching those of their partner. Furthermore, in the very last sentence of their article (page 8), Kaneka and Mturi write: "This corroborates a study in Kenya (Tumlinson et al, 2013) who concluded that partners' fertility preferences had a bearing on women's contraceptive use." This concluding statement is misleading to your readership given female participants in the 2013 Kenya study were actually more likely to use contraception when they perceived their partner wanted more children than they did, compared to women in couples with concordant fertility desires. The larger take-home message from the Kenya study is that men do not consistently dictate the contraceptive behavior of their partners. This study does not support the recent findings of Kaneka and Mturi and their article should be corrected to more transparently reflect this discordance.

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