

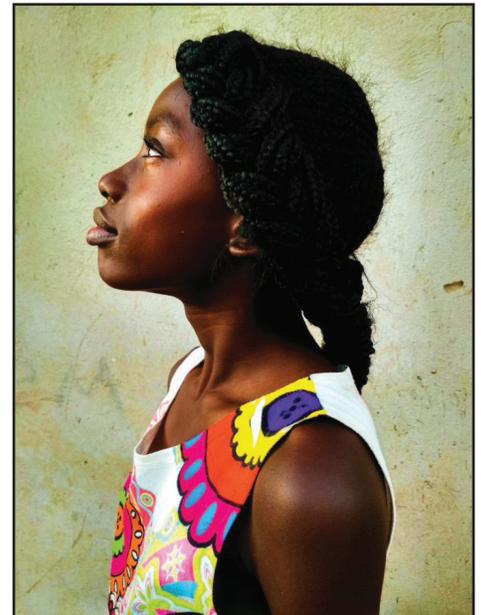


# Young Women's Empowerment and Fertility Intentions (AS77)

*An Analysis Brief from The DHS Program*

## Why study the association between youth empowerment and fertility intentions?

Fertility intentions among young women are important drivers of future fertility trends. Empowerment has been linked to the ability to realize fertility intentions - low empowerment among women is associated with having more children, shorter birth spacing, and lower use of contraception. Despite the importance of the large youth population on future population growth, there has been little research on the association between young women's empowerment and their fertility intentions, in part because there are few measures of empowerment that are relevant to young, unmarried women. This study develops and analyses a new youth empowerment scale to explore the relationship between empowerment in women age 15-29 and two outcomes: ideal number of children and intention to use family planning.



Young woman in Kabwe, Zambia  
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## Which countries were included in the study?

This analysis included data from 10 countries with DHS surveys between 2015 and 2019 with all-women samples: Ethiopia 2016, Haiti 2016-17, Malawi 2015-16, Mali 2018, Nepal 2016, Nigeria 2018, Philippines 2017, Senegal 2019, Uganda 2016, and Zambia 2018.

## What methods were used to conduct this analysis?

The author first developed a youth empowerment scale which ultimately included 22 items in 6 domains (see box). Bivariate analysis of the association between the fertility outcomes and young women's empowerment was conducted. Finally, bivariable and multivariable regression models were estimated to assess the association with young women's empowerment, first on its own, and then controlling for other factors that could confound the observed bivariable association between empowerment and fertility intentions.

### Domains in Youth Empowerment Scale

-  1. Violence attitudes (e.g. reasons wife beating is justified)
-  2. Digital connectedness (e.g. ownership of mobile phone, use of internet and bank account)
-  3. Work and earnings (e.g. current employment and earnings)
-  4. Health facility access (e.g. barriers to getting treatment when sick)
-  5. Major asset ownership (e.g. house or land)
-  6. Reproductive health knowledge (e.g. knows ovulatory cycle, knows FP methods)

## What are the key results?

### Youth empowerment:

- Youth empowerment varies by country. Only 13% of young women in Mali are in the highest tercile for empowerment compared with 81% of young women in the Philippines. Nigeria is in the middle, with about 1/3 of women in each empowerment group (Figure 1).
- In most countries, high levels of youth empowerment are highest among the oldest youth, and young women's empowerment is lowest among currently married youth. There is no consistent pattern between empowerment and school status.

### Ideal number of children:

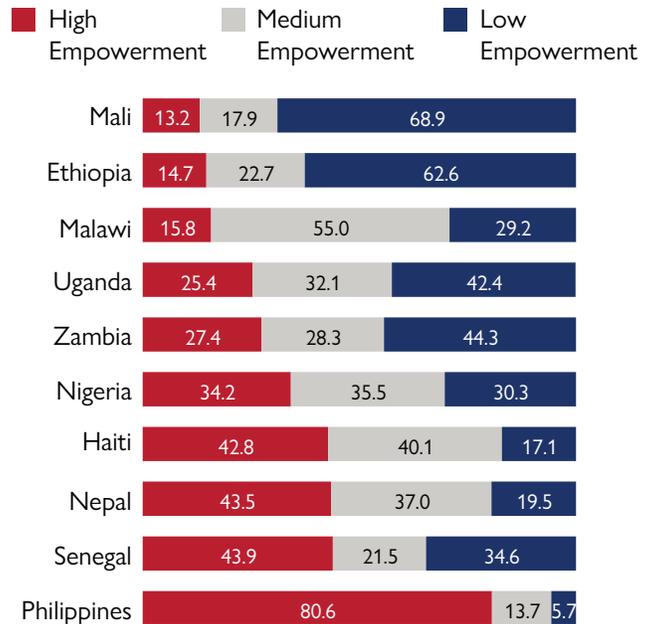
- The mean ideal number of children among young women age 15-29 ranges from 2.0 in Nepal to 5.8 in Nigeria.
- Ideal number of children decreases as youth empowerment increases in all 10 countries. In Nigeria, young women with low empowerment would like an average of 6.8 children, 2 children more than young women with low empowerment (Figure 2).

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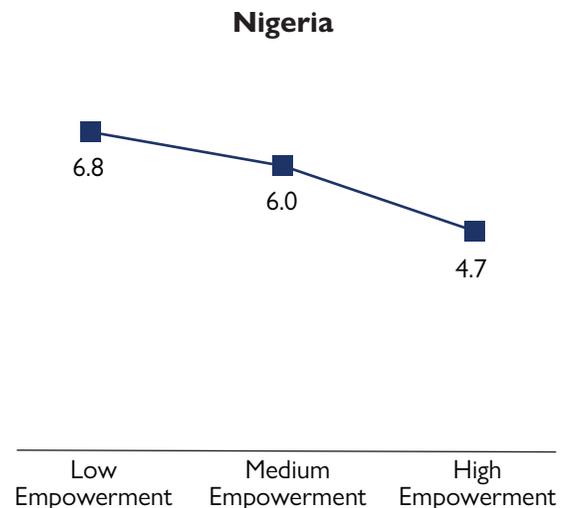
***In general, young women with high empowerment want fewer children.***

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**Figure 1. Youth Empowerment among Young Women age 15-29 by country (percentage in pooled terciles)**



**Figure 2. Ideal Number of Children by Empowerment**  
Number among young women age 15-29

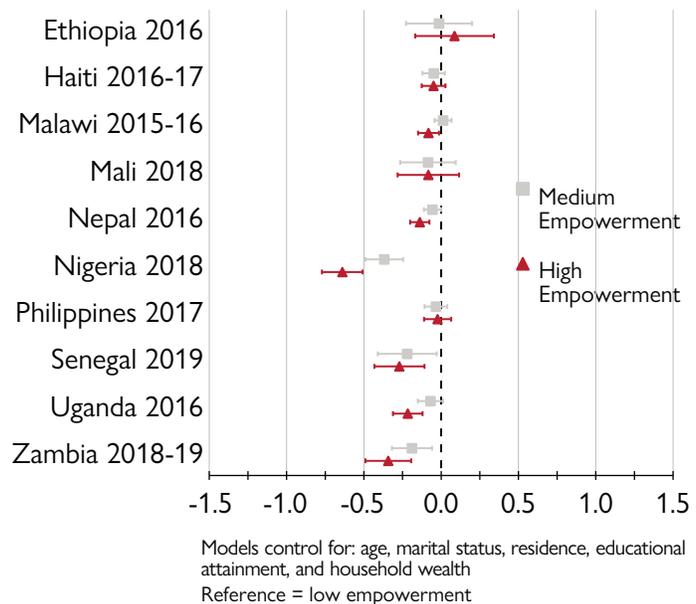


- Multivariable models show that in 5 countries, women with medium and high empowerment have significantly lower ideal numbers of children than women with low empowerment (Figure 3).

*Even when controlling for background characteristics, medium and highly empowered young women in Nepal, Nigeria, Senegal, Uganda, and Zambia want fewer children than their less empowered peers. In Malawi the relationship holds true only for young women with high empowerment.*

**Figure 3. Ideal Number of Children and Young Women’s Empowerment: Multivariate Analysis**

Youth empowerment coefficients for ideal number of children from separate linear multivariable regressions models among women age 15-29

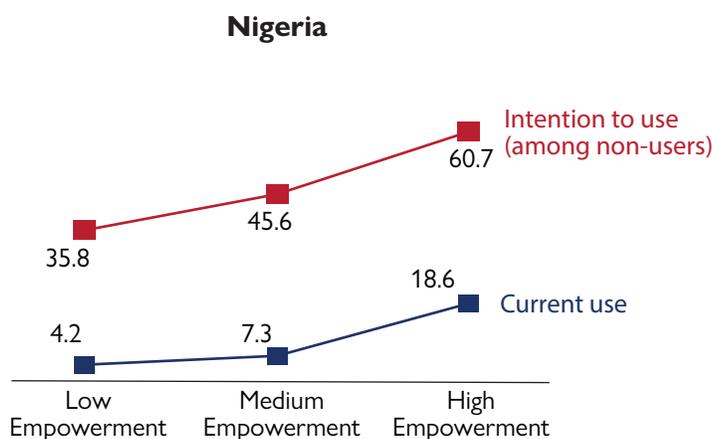


**Intention to use contraception:**

- In the 10 study countries, current use of contraception among women age 15-49 is lowest in Nigeria (10%) and highest in Malawi (38%). Among non-users of contraception, intention to use in the future ranges from 33% in Senegal to 91% in Nepal.
- In general, current use and intention to use increase with youth empowerment, but this pattern is inconsistent among study countries (see Figure 4 for Nigeria case study).

**Figure 4. Current Use and Intention to Use Contraception by Empowerment**

Percentage among young women age 15-29



*In Nigeria, young women with high empowerment are much more likely to be currently using contraception than those with low empowerment, and among non-users, those with high empowerment are much more likely to intend to use in the future than those with low empowerment.*

## Young Women's Empowerment and Fertility Intentions (AS77)

- The association between women's empowerment and current contraceptive use is statistically significant in multivariable models in Ethiopia, Haiti, Malawi, Nigeria, and Senegal. Young women with high empowerment in Nigeria are more than twice as likely to be currently using contraception as those with low empowerment.
- The association between youth empowerment and intention to use contraception among non-users is statistically significant in multivariable models in 8 out of the 10 countries (Ethiopia, Haiti, Malawi, Mali, Nepal, Nigeria, Philippines, and Senegal).

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***In 8 of the 10 study countries, intention to use contraception is positively associated with young women's empowerment.***

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A woman and child outside the temple Janaki Mandir, Janakpur, Nepal  
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### What does this mean?

This study presents an innovative method for measuring youth empowerment, and provides evidence that youth empowerment is negatively associated with ideal number of children (6 out of 10 study countries) and positively associated with intention to use contraception in the future (in 8 out of 10 study countries). The association between youth empowerment and current use of contraception is weaker, but present in 5 out of 10 study countries. These findings suggest the importance of programmatic and policy interventions to build and maintain young women's empowerment as a mechanism towards achieving their fertility intentions.

This brief summarizes The DHS Program's Analytical Studies No. 77, by Kerry L.D. MacQuarrie, with funding from The United States Agency for International Development through The DHS Program implemented by ICF. For the full report or more information about The DHS Program, please visit [www.dhsprogram.com](http://www.dhsprogram.com).