



# Couple's agreement and disagreement on fertility intention: an insight into the reproductive decision process in a polygamous community in Northern Malawi



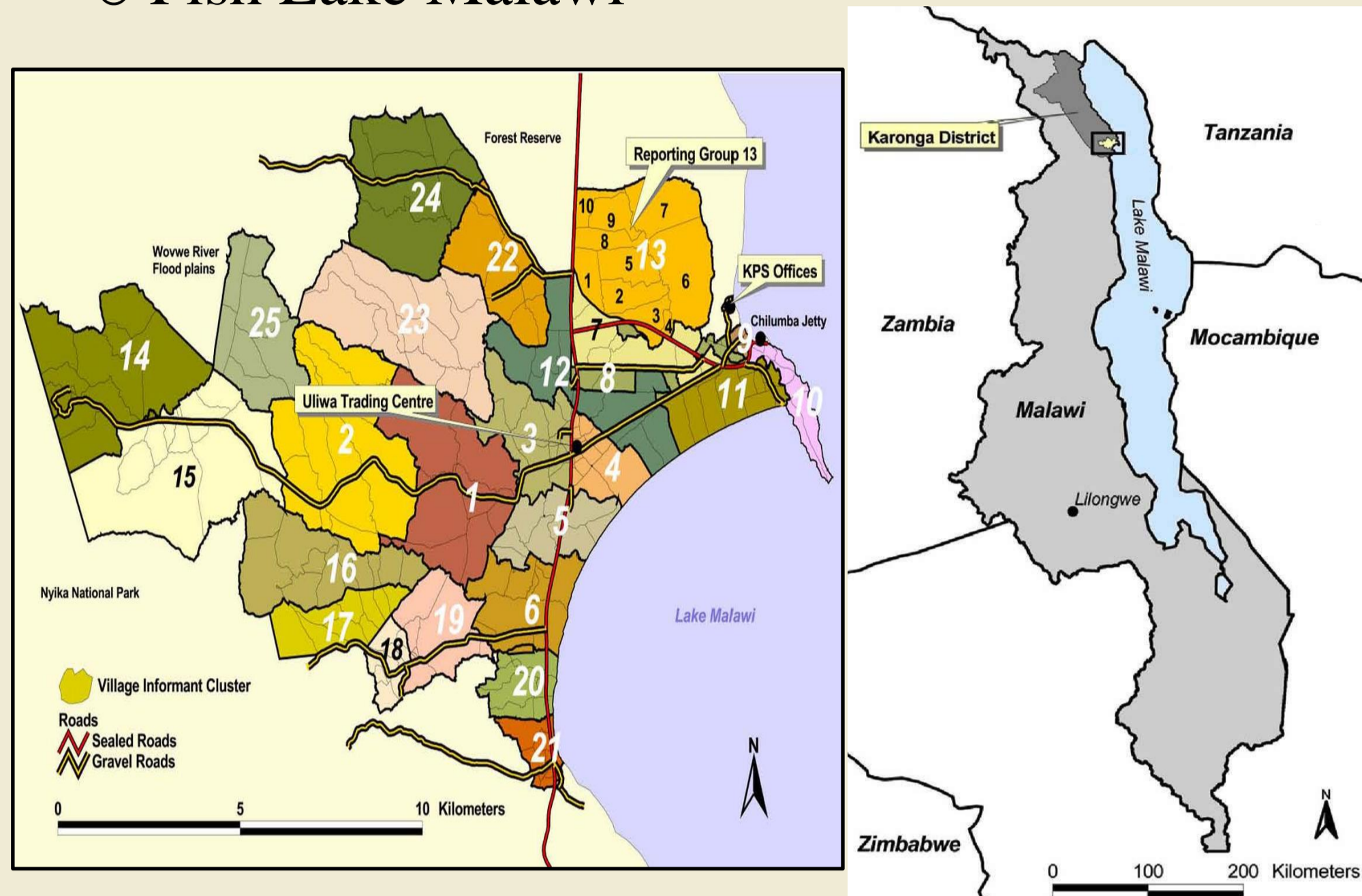
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## Karonga Prevention Study :

- Karonga district northern Malawi
- Approx. 236,000 people live in 280 villages
- Subsistence agriculture
- Fish Lake Malawi



In 2002- 2004 a Demographic Surveillance Site was set up in the South part of the district in a population n of around 30,000 people and a **baseline census** was conducted in order to collect demographic information on each individual, household including source of income, housing quality and assets.

The baseline data are continuously updated in a *Continuous Registration System (CRS)*

✓-records 'vital events' (births and deaths), changes in household membership and in and out migration of household members.

✓-Village informants  
See: <http://www.lshtm.ac.uk/ideu/kps/>

## 1. Introduction and background

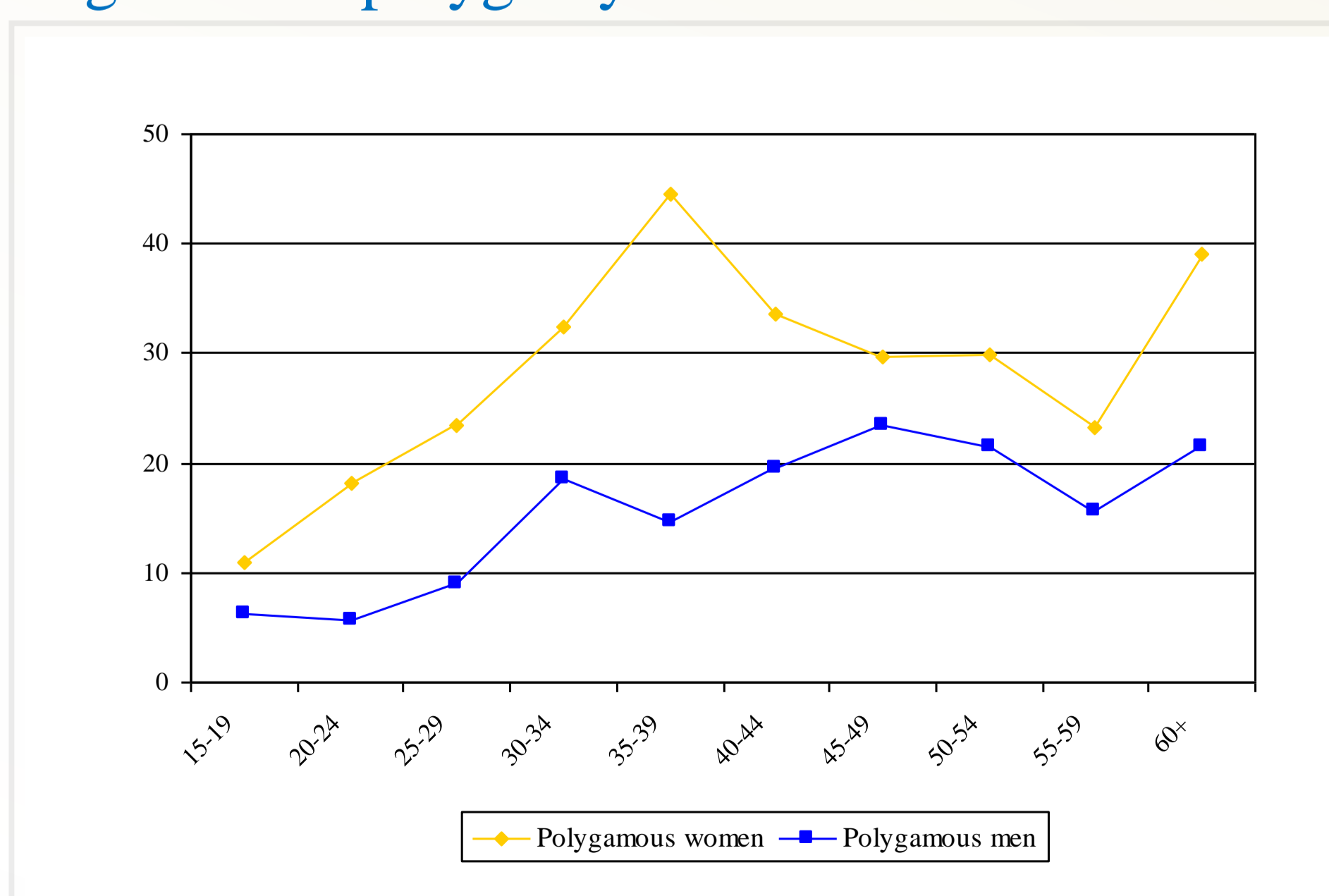
Despite the strong effort of family planning programmes in the past 30 years → **the lack of attention to men**, is one of the **reason for the persistently high level of unmet need**

- couple's **fertility decision making process** (the translation of fertility preference into reproductive decision) is different in **polygamous unions** than in **monogamous unions**
- **MEN Vs WOMEN** → mixed evidence for this hypothesis (Dodoo, 1998; Ezeh, 1993; Bankole and Singh, 1998; Speizer, 1995).
- Few studies have examined this issue in the context of polygamous couples
- **PROBLEM WITH LINKAGE OF MEN AND WOMEN INFO.**

### 2004 MDHS

- TFR: 6 → 5.74 for 2005-07 in KPS
- AFM: 18
- AFB: 20
- the community is patrilineal and the residence after marriage is usually patrilocal.

### High rate of polygamy:



Source: KPS, data from November 2007 to May 2008.

57 % of women wanted the pregnancy, 20 % wanted it later  
20 % wanted no more.

## 2. Aims/Objectives

❑ This study uses data collected between October 2008 and May 2009 from a module on fertility intention linked to an on-going Demographic Surveillance Site in Karonga district in Northern Malawi.

❑ Data on marriages, fertility and fertility intention are analyzed and wife and husband's fertility preferences are compared.

❑ An analysis of the use of contraception and level of agreement and disagreement is then performed to gain an insight into the reproductive decision making process of polygamous couples.

## 3. Data and methods

❑ This study uses data collected between October 2008 and May 2009 from a module on fertility intention linked to an on-going Demographic Surveillance Site of Karonga.

❑ As part of a study funded by the Hewlett/ESRC "**Unintended Childbearing and family welfare in rural Malawi**" (RES- 183-25-0013) a set of questions to measure:

✓ **Retrospective** 'wantedness' of the last born child or current pregnancy  
✓ **prospective fertility intention** of couples was designed to assess whether or not the husband and wife *separately* wish to have another child and the preferred timing of the next birth.

- ✓ followed by questions on *what each partner thinks* is the desire of their spouse.
- ✓ respondents who want NO MORE children are also asked the *reason* and to *state whether the occurrence of a future birth would leave major consequences* and if so, of *what nature*.
- ✓ A similar set of questions in the men's questionnaire **including separate preference questions for each wife.**

Also:

- Women:
  - current fertility, marital status
  - ever and current use of contraception.
- Men, equally, (# of child with each of their current wives if in a polygamous relationship).

## 4. Results

### WOMEN:

73 % currently married  
84 % ever married.  
The mean age at first marriage is 18

### MEN:

59.3 % currently married  
63 % ever married,  
15 % currently married had **more than one** wife.  
The mean age at first marriage 23.

- ✓ Marriage is almost universal (only 3% of women 25+ having never married).
- ✓ high marital turnover : 28 per cent ever married women aged 15-49 having more than one marriage)
- ✓ Similarly for men, 48 per cent of men had more than one marriage and 20 per cent had 3 or more marriages in their life time.
- ✓ 35 per cent of currently married women use any type of contraceptive method
- ✓ 33.3 use a modern method. Condom, 36 %, Injections, 32 % and female ste., 18 %).

## IDEAL FAMILY SIZE

WOMEN (1 CHI) is 3.4 children  
Women (6+) 5.6 children  
Men (1 CHI) : 4 children  
½ women with 6 children would like to have < 6.

## RETROSPECTIVE FERTILITY INTENTIONS

The data → diff. pattern from that the national level:

**Only 3 % women declaring a pregnancy unwanted.**

An **anthropological study** conducted in this study area highlights the **prevailing ethos** of 'loving the child' and found that women rarely declare a child unwanted (Hemmings, 2007).

## PROSPECTIVE FERTILITY INTENTIONS

Desired for children	NUMBER OF LIVING CHILDREN						
	0	1	2	3	4	5	6+
Want No More	20.5	10.7	23.3	35.4	53.7	66.7	83.2
Have another: this year	30.7	9.3	4.9	5.0	3.8	2.7	
Have another: 1-2 years	20.5	17.3	16.2	11.2	6.8	4.0	2.1
Have another: 2-3 years	5.1	32.5	24.4	15.9	10.7	3.6	2.6
Have another: 3+ years	5.1	23.2	23.8	23.9	14.6	9.3	2.1
Unsure	12.8	5.5	6.6	8.5	9.7	12.9	5.7
Missing	5.1	1.4	0.8	0	0.6	0.9	3.1
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Number	39	289	365	339	309	225	382

The most common reason for wanting to wait was concerns related to her own health or health of the child (30 per cent and 11 per cent), financial reasons (18 per cent) or child spacing (29 per cent).

There is a significant difference in the level of current use of contraception **by degree of 'unwantedness'**

- ✓ In order to gauge to effect of a mistimed pregnancy we included additional questions to capture how strong the respondent felt about this consequence – the respondent was asked: "If you had a child in the next year, will there be serious consequences? If YES, which consequences?" (financial, health, child health, etc..)

57 % WANT NO MORE - **serious consequences** use a modern method of contraception,

40 % WANT LATER - - have **serious consequences.**

### Wife and Wife's view of husband fertility preference for currently married women.

- ✓ 72 % of women who want no more children believe that also their husband wants no more, whereas less than 10 % of women who want no more believe that their husband would like a child sometime soon.
- ✓ We introduced a question to assess whether **relatives participate or 'make pressure'** in the couple's decision to have another child. Interestingly, we found:
  - ✓ 10 % of women stated that relatives contribute to the couple's decision (women's relative from paternal side are more likely to 'make pressure' for having another child). Children belong to their father's family if he had made requisite payments during the marriage (Hemmings, 2007).

## 5. Next Steps:

- ✓ compare responses,
- ✓ logistic models to see whether the use of contraception is higher or lower depending on husband/wife response and their level of agreement or disagreement (including running separately for currently polygamous, currently monogamous).