

**PRIYA NANDA**

**EMBEDDING NEW MEASURES OF AGENCY IN SURVEYS TO  
UNDERSTAND IMPACT ON CONTRACEPTIVE USE IN INDIA**

**IUSSP Webinar  
June 21<sup>st</sup>**

**How should we define and measure demand  
for and use of family planning? New  
directions and frameworks for family  
planning measurement**

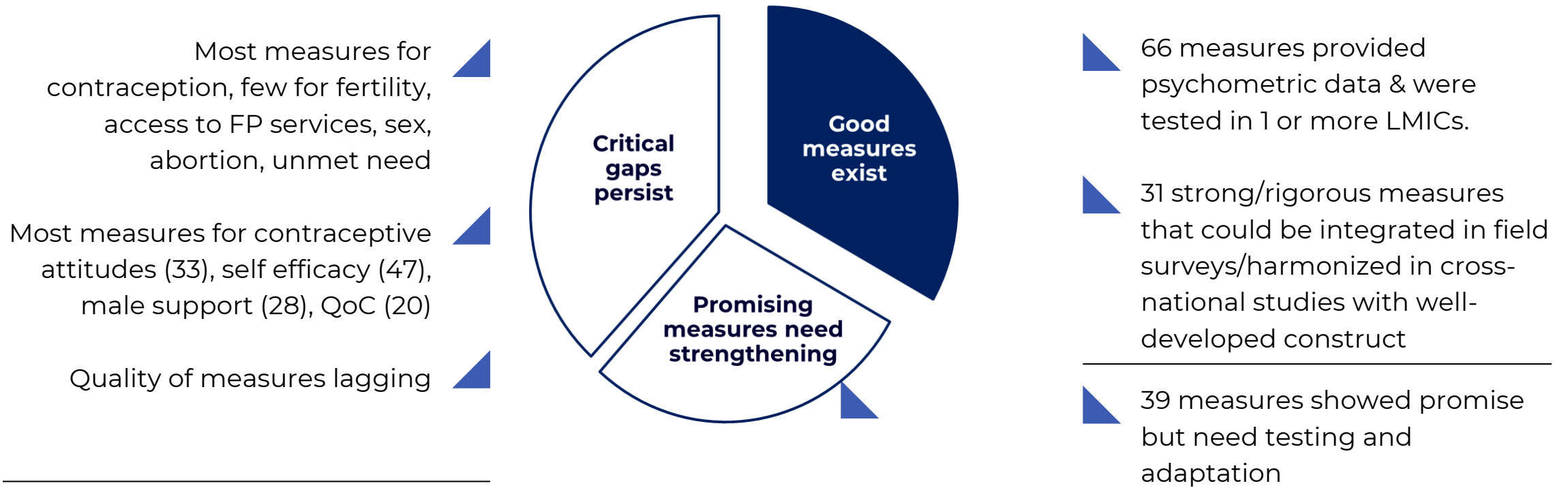
## Premise

Limited understanding of the 'demand' side determinants of contraceptive use, especially women's agency as a driver of use

- Lack of clear conceptual understanding and consensus of how women's agency is defined
- Lack of consistent understanding of influence of reproductive agency/autonomy on 'use' and intention to use (both extent of and how does this happen)
- Where defined, reliance mostly on what has been captured in the DHS
- Field-based knowledge, measurements and insights are limited
- Missing symbiotic connection and understanding between researchers and implementers to know what works — and why
- Neither researchers nor implementers fully understand what women chose to disclose, what they conform to, what do they not conform to and in some sense what is 'agency' — does non use, traditional method use connote agency?

# The role of gender measures in predicting contraceptive use and demonstrating relevance for programs

Grant to GEH, UCSD (Anita Raj Nandita Bhan et. al.) to work with a consortium of partners in UP and Bihar



Source: Bhan, N., Thomas, E., Dixit, A., Averbach, S., Dey, A., Rao, N., ... & Raj, A. (2020). Measuring Women's Agency and Gender Norms in Family Planning: What do we know and where do we go. Center on Gender Equity and Health (GEH).

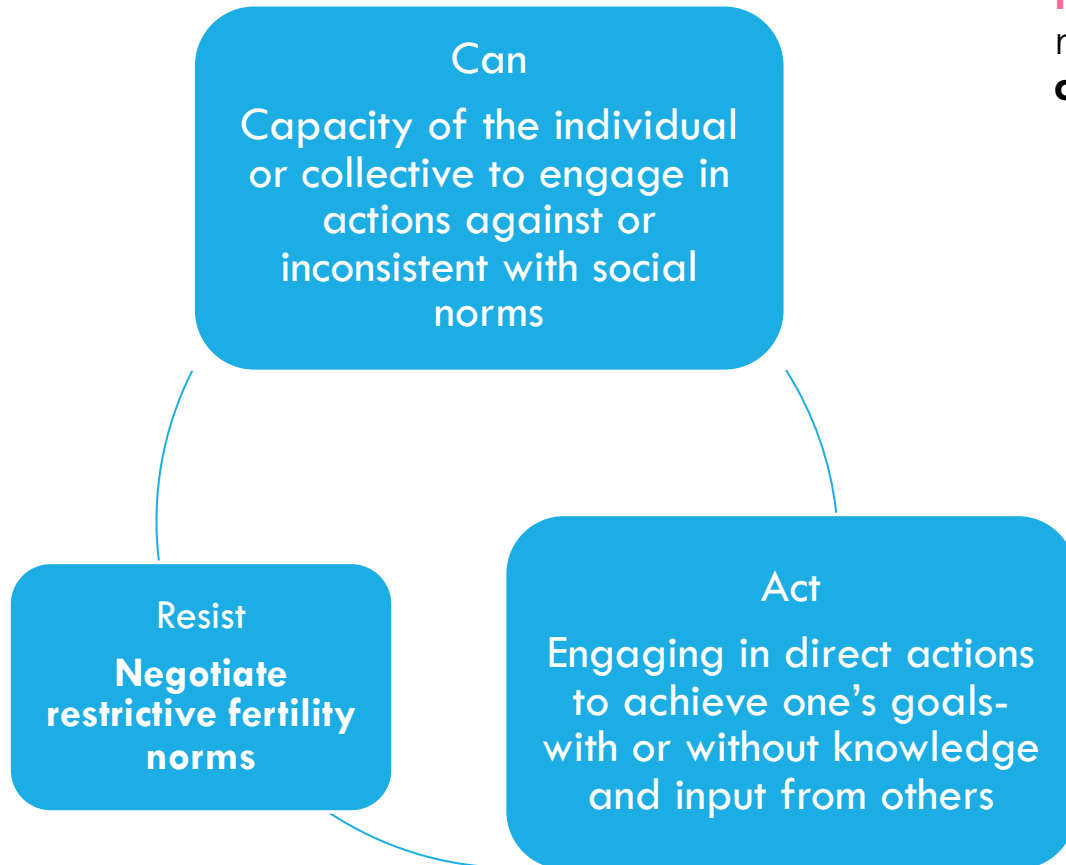
Many challenges in situating and testing new measures in the UP and Bihar surveys in midst of COVID

- Lack of conviction that these are important amongst research partners executing the surveys
- Lack of space and time
- Genuine problems in translation and adaptation of key constructs
- Example: Norms measure (role of religion)

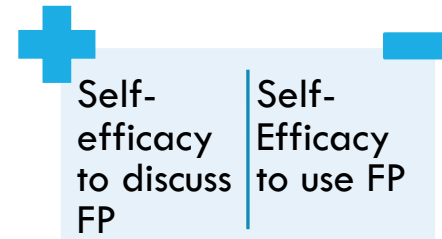
Measures Tested		Uttar Pradesh Sample (2020)	Bihar Sample (2021)
01	FP Self-Efficacy	15 item measure: n= 9403	13 item measure: n=22668
02	Spousal Communication	n=12,200	n=12,786
03	Balance of Power	5 item measure: n=206	5 item measure, n=4417
04	Social Norms related to FP		n=3946
05	Household and FP decision-making	HH: n=11,990; FP: n=10,924	HH: 22,227
05	Domestic violence	n=9826	22668
05	Mobility	n= 12200	n= 22668
05	Interpersonal Quality of FP	n=*340	

\*CGEH within the FP MLE Consortium UP and Bihar  
Data unfeasible for analyses; similar outcomes for covert use and reproductive coercion

# LOCATING AGENCY DOMAINS IN A FRAMEWORK



**Higher number** of women reported greater **self-efficacy to discuss FP** with their husbands



**SE to discuss FP** had **greater odds** for the following outcomes as compared to **SE to use FP**

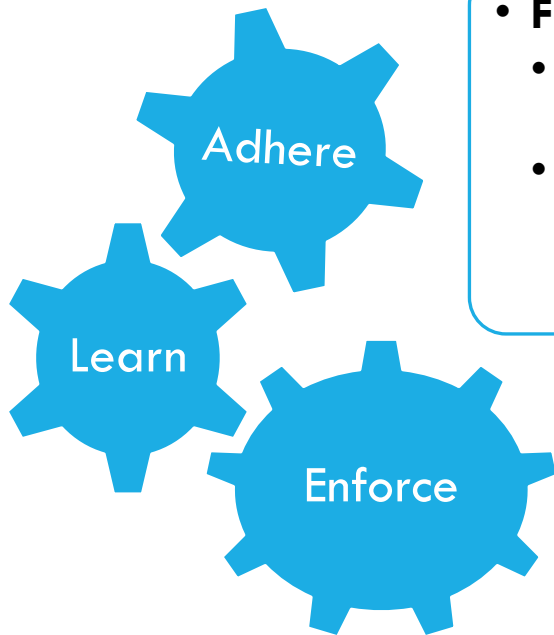
- Higher spousal comms
- Modern contraceptive use
- Reversible modern use
- Traditional method use:

- **Balance of Power**  
Who has more say? Who gets their way in a disagreement? Talks openly about sex

**Higher Balance of Power** associated with:

- Marital relationship equity
- Spacing method use
- Traditional method use:

# LOCATING AGENCY DOMAINS IN A FRAMEWORK



- **Fertility Norms Scale**

- Injunctive norms-focused scale
- Pro-natal norms, early childbearing pressures

Key issues affecting men & women **differed**

- pronatal norms
- parental pressure for early childbearing
- social sanctions
- pressure for children
- community talk if no children
- non-acceptance

Women reporting **greater restrictive norms** were more likely to report:

- trying to get pregnant
- being unsure on delaying pregnancy and birth intervals
- no children
- two children with no son

### What this evidence tell us

- Gender and power dynamics in relationships have deep meanings -not fully captured by a few select measures.
- Field of measurement is evolving and throwing up new challenges –what has been excluded or not measured still or does not have cross cultural validity
- Can we consolidate/harmonize –would that mean collapsing or risk of ‘essentializing’ these very complex frameworks and measures when it at has taken so long to get here

### Understanding the evidence-reproductive/sexual journeys

- Reproductive autonomy at one point may not have the same ‘effect’ later in time (age or tenure of relationship aside - changing nature of relations that include intimacy, power etc)
- Agency and Power asymmetries - context of violence or lack of informed choice or full choice; covert use
- Sexuality and gender identities –meaning of reproduction and marriage is changing (e.g. surrogacy). Risk of Implied and hidden meanings.

### Extent of dialogue with implementers and what this means

- Programs have a fairly prosaic way to respond (number of outreach visits, couple counselling, more information overload to woman, number of touch points for information, tele-counselling)-- need more creative explorations around this wealth of evidence from gender measures
- What are new ways and resources required for rethinking programs--programs were singularly delivering contraceptive use--not choice or justice

### Who needs to be convinced about these measures and what would it take to fundamentally shift what we measure and why

- What we assume in our surveys and is there space to challenge that (sex within marriage, frequency of sex, non binary and complex partnerships)
- There are many asks –can surveys deliver? How we do reconcile this?
- Interdisciplinarity is key so bringing in new thinkers in existing paradigms of demography or family health

# RECOMMENDATIONS

**Consolidate** –Consolidate and test promising measures through cross-national and in-country surveys and to test relationships of a measure with a wide cross-section of determinants and outcomes.

**Dialogue**-create forums and enabling regular conversations between academics and survey implementers regionally or globally to improve rigor, conceptual grounding of measures and help in fast-tracking innovations into large-scale surveys.

**Experience**--share methodologies, measures and experiences in family planning monitoring and evaluation to reduce redundancies and leverage existing work with higher clarity and efficiency

**Frame** –new ways of thinking about programs –the focus may be on improving choice and agency since there is mounting evidence that these do predict use.





**THANK YOU**