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CAN WE TALK IN PRIVATE (ABOUT FAMILY PLANNING)?

Women who received private access to vouchers for contraceptives were more likely to take up and use contraception, compared to women whose husbands were involved in the voucher program. In contexts in which women have less bargaining power in family planning decisions, providing private access to contraceptives may be an important and effective means of enabling women to achieve their fertility goals.

Featuring an evaluation by Nava Ashraf, Erica Field, and Jean Lee



PHOTO: UNFPA

Women who received the voucher privately were 10 percentage points (23 percent) more likely to redeem the voucher, compared to women whose husbands were involved in the program. This difference was largely driven by women's desires to hide their choices from their husbands.

The voucher provided women with access to the contraceptive of their choice, including injectables which are more easily concealed. Injectable contraceptive use was 6 percentage points (33 percent) higher among women who received the voucher privately, compared to women whose husbands were involved in the program. This difference was almost three times as large among women who believed their husbands wanted more additional children than they did at the onset of the study.

Among women who did not want children in the next two years, those who received the voucher privately delayed their next pregnancy by an average of three to five months more than women who received the voucher with their husbands. This postponement represents a significant health benefit for women and children in Zambia, where the average spacing between pregnancies is 26 months.

Among women who believed their husbands wanted more children than they did, women who received the voucher privately were less likely to report being healthy and happy. This finding suggests that concealing contraceptive use may carry a psychological cost.

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