erences between marital partners are related to contraceptive use in the country is unknown. Given that age differences might influence relationship dynamics in ways that have adverse effects on women’s health, and that male partners have enormous influence on fertility decisions and contraceptive use in Nigeria, the current study examines the association of age differences between married couples with women’s contraceptive behavior. Specifically, the study seeks to determine whether a large age difference between marital partners is negatively associated with the woman’s ability to use contraceptives.

METHODS

This study used matched couples data from the 2008 Nigerian Demographic and Health Survey (NDHS). The couples data set includes responses from 8,731 women aged 15–49 and their partners. We excluded 1,315 women who were pregnant, 203 who were infecund, 636 who had not had sex for at least six months and 25 whose partner was infecund. The resulting analytic sample consisted of 6,552 sexually active women—6,518 fecund women who had fecund partners and 34 women who had undergone sterilization as a family planning method. The latter group was left in the analytic sample because their use of sterilization as a family planning method may be related to the age difference between them and their partners.

The dependent variable was current contraceptive use. Women were asked if they were doing something or using something to delay or avoid becoming pregnant. Current contraceptive use was coded as 0 for nonuse, 1 for use of any couple method (condom, withdrawal or periodic abstinence) and 2 for use of any non–couple method (pill, IUD, injectable, diaphragm, female sterilization, implant or lactational amenorrhea). Although the methods grouped as “couple methods” include both modern and traditional methods, they all require the involvement and cooperation of the male partner. We examined these methods separately from other methods to explore the possible influence of male partners on women’s contraceptive use and whether age differences between marital partners are associated with use of such methods.

*The wealth index is a composite measure of a household’s living standard that is based on ownership of selected assets (e.g., televisions, bicycles), materials used for housing construction, and types of water access and sanitation facilities. The index, which is generated using principal components analysis, places individual households on a continuous scale of relative wealth. For this study, all households selected for the NDHS were divided into tertiles (low, medium, high) on the basis of their wealth index scores; to avoid sample bias, the resulting classifications were merged with the individual women’s and couples’ data before the analysis as a family planning method. The latter group was left in the analytic sample because their use of sterilization as a family planning method may be related to the age difference between them and their partners.

The key independent variable was partners’ age difference, which was derived by subtracting the woman’s age from her partner’s. Women were grouped according to whether they were older than their partner (<0), 0–4, 5–9, or 10 or more years younger. Since Nigeria is regionally, culturally, socially and economically diverse, and marital partners’ fertility intentions may interact in complex ways, the analysis controlled for a number of related variables. Individual characteristics included in the analysis were the women’s age (categorized as 15–24, 25–34, or 35 or older), religion (Muslim, Catholic, other Christian or other) and type of employment (professional, sales and service, agriculture and other, or none). Other variables were joint measures related to women and their partners, including household wealth (low, medium or high), place of residence (urban or rural), region (South West, North Central, North East, North West, South East or South South) and type of marriage (monogamous or polygamous). Three final variables compared women with their spouses. A measure of educational attainment classified couples according to whether both had no education, both had a primary education, both had at least a secondary education, the woman was more educated than the man or the man was more educated than the woman. Another variable assessed whether the two partners had the same number of children, the woman had more children than her husband did (e.g., because she had children from a prior marriage) or the man had more children than his wife did. The last measure examined congruence in fertility intentions: whether both partners wanted a child soon, both wanted to space or limit births, the woman wanted a child soon but the man did not, the man wanted a child soon but the woman did not, or other mismatches in intentions.

Individuals were classified as wanting a child soon if they wanted one within two years, were unsure of their desired timing or undecided about their fertility intentions; as wanting to space births if they wanted a child more than two years in the future; and as wanting to limit births if they wanted no future births.

Descriptive, bivariate and multivariate analyses were carried out using Stata version 12. The bivariate and multivariate analyses used multinomial logistic regression modeling to assess the unadjusted and adjusted relative risk ratios of the association of age difference between partners...