

Publication

'The body is difficult': reproductive navigation through sociality and corporeality in rural Burundi

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The route from family planning intentions to practices is not linear, it is contingent on different social factors including the preferences of individuals and couples, their gendered positions and bargaining power, the wider political, economic and social context, and also physical and bodily circumstances. We used qualitative data collected in rural Burundi between 2013 and 2016 to explore how these diverse factors influence reproductive navigation in a context framed by uncertainty and changing social norms. We describe representations of bodily (pre)dispositions for fertility and reproduction, such as the 'natural' capacity for birth spacing or the bodily capacity to use 'natural' (having a regular cycle) and 'modern' methods (not having negative side effects) that contribute collectively to an understanding of 'the body is difficult'. We found that despite these bodily constraints, women enact embodied agency to ensure livelihoods and social status, thus framing their reproductive intentions and practices. In the context of Burundi where corporeality is key to gendered social belonging, family planning programmes fail to respond to the needs and concerns of women and their embodied reproductive experiences.

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