

Societies with more educated women have higher coverage and lower inequalities on demand for family planning satisfied: an analysis of 570 subnational regions from 46 countries.

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Contextual predictors, especially average women's education at subnational levels, play an important role in increasing coverage and decreasing associated wealth-related inequalities on demand for family planning satisfied with modern methods.

BACKGROUND

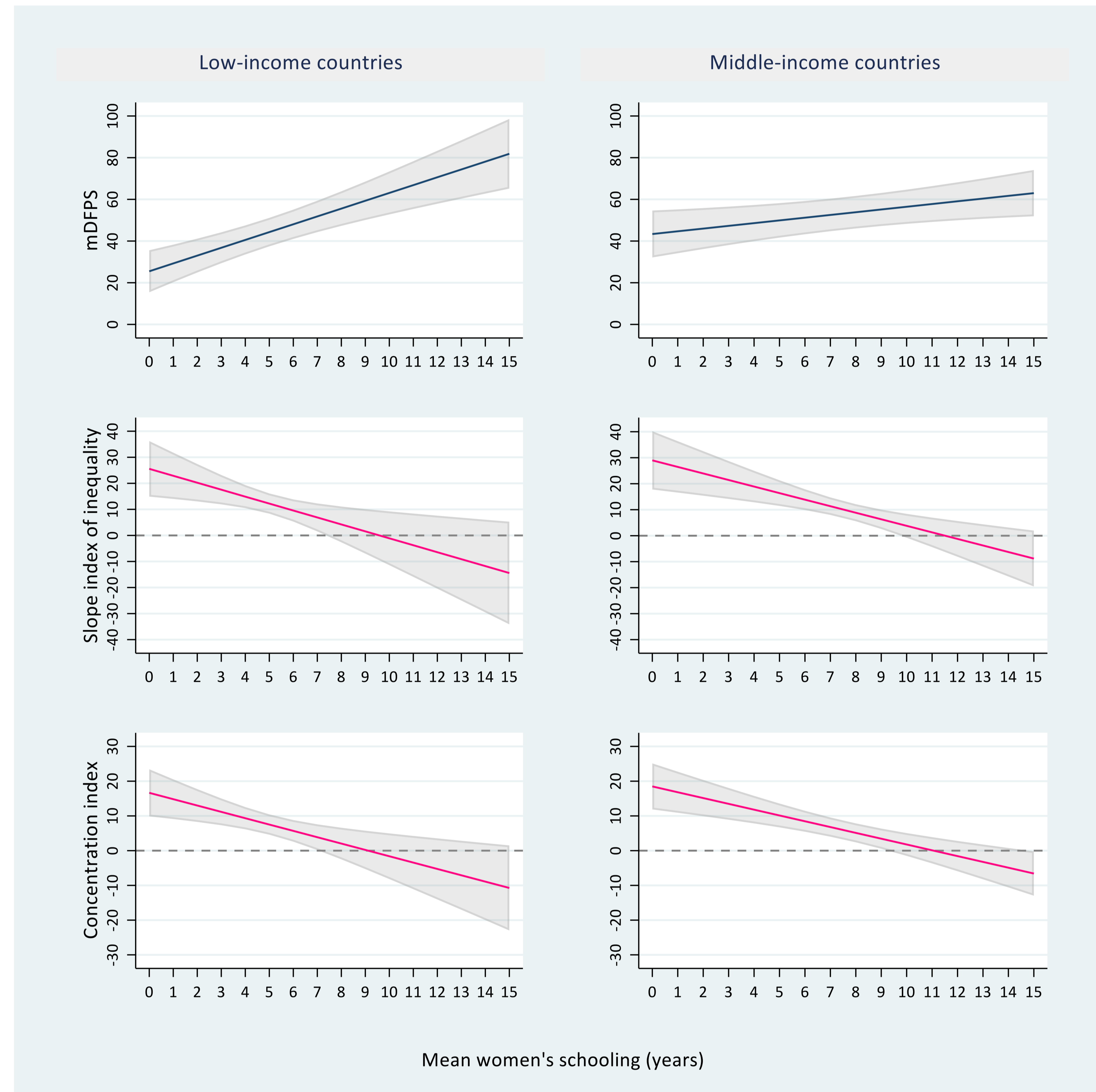
Demand for family planning satisfied (DFPS) enhances women's and children's health. Global efforts have been made to increase access to family planning services, especially in low and middle-income countries (LMICs). However, there is little evidence on how contextual drivers are related to coverage and inequalities in DFPS. Our aim was to assess the association between subnational characteristics with DFPS coverage and wealth-related inequalities

METHODS

We rely on data from the latest Demographic and Health Surveys available from any LMIC, conducted since 2010. We conducted an ecological study considering the subnational level from each country as our unit of analysis (e.g., region, province, etc. - as defined by the survey). Our main outcomes were DFPS with modern methods and absolute and relative wealth-related inequalities measures (slope index of inequalities, SII, and concentration index, CIX). The predictors were estimated for the subnational levels: the percentage of people living in urban areas, mean women's age and years of education, the proportions of women who were employed, who married before age 18, and who were in the highest tertile of empowerment according to the decision-making and attitude towards violence domains of the Survey-Based Women's Empowerment Index (SWPER). The male to female educational attainment ratio was also assessed. We applied a multilevel linear regression analysis, with the country at level 2 and the subnational region at level 1. All analyses were stratified by country's income level as defined by the World Bank.

RESULTS

We included 570 subnational regions from 46 LMICs. The median DFPS coverage was 56.4%, being this coverage 8.4 percentage points higher (SII), or 2.8 times higher (CIX), on average for the wealthiest group. Except for women's education, no other variable was associated with the outcomes in the adjusted model. In the full multilevel model for low-income countries, each additional year of schooling increased DFPS coverage by 2.3 pp (95% CI 0.5; 4.0) and decreased CIX and SII by 1.5 (95% CI -2.7; -0.3) and 2.9 (95% CI -4.8; -1.0) points, respectively. In middle-income countries, women's education was not associated with DFPS coverage, but with a reduction on the CIX (-1.2; 95% CI -1.9; -0.4) and SII (-1.8; 95% CI -3.2; -0.4). Predicted values of coverage, SII and CIX are shown in the Figure 1.



CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, our study emphasizes the importance of women's empowerment and gender equality in education in achieving family planning outcomes. It draws attention to the potential of provinces as focal points for interventions. Given that provinces often have administrative and policy-making autonomy, policies and programs can be developed to address the specific educational, economic and demographic contexts of each region. To optimize their effectiveness in achieving family planning goals, it is essential to tailor interventions based on the income levels of the country's provinces.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

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