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**The Quality of Family Relationships, Women's Agency,
and Maternal and Child Health in North India**

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Women's empowerment, or agency, has received a great deal of attention as both a means and an end of international development. Education, micro-credit, and land rights have all been promoted as means to help women become the beneficiaries of development. At the same time, these policies and programs are seen as ways to assist women in becoming more powerful agents of development. Empowered women appear better able to secure the well-being of themselves and their families. However, the complexities of the links among women's agency and its determinants and consequences are still not well understood.

One element that has not been adequately addressed is the quality of marital and other family relationships. Affection, respect, and support from family members are likely to be important sources of women's agency. The quality of family relationships may also mediate the impact of women's agency on maternal and child health. Where husbands and other family members care more about the welfare of women, women's agency may be less important for securing better health. Thus, this study investigates how the quality of family relations impact both women's agency and maternal and child health.

This question is addressed using a mix of methods. Specific hypotheses are tested using secondary data from the Women's Reproductive Histories Survey from the state of Madhya Pradesh. Participant observation and collection of semi-structured interviews is also underway in Darjeeling District, West Bengal. Mothers of young children, their husbands, and co-resident mothers-in-law from a selection of village households are being interviewed. Results of the qualitative fieldwork will be used to inductively explore the concepts of relationship quality, women's agency, and the mechanisms linking those concepts to each other and to maternal and child health. This work is funded by a Fulbright Hays Doctoral Dissertation Research Abroad Fellowship and a Doctoral Dissertation Improvement Grant from the National Science Foundation.