

Family Planning Programs and Fertility Preferences: The Role of Ideational Change Processes in Northern Ghana

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Introduction

- There is much debate in demographic literature on whether and to what extent preferences for fewer children are brought about by ideational processes through informal social interaction and whether these processes are driven by or are independent of family planning programs
- Yet little systematic data/studies exist on diffusion of ideas on fertility preferences
- We take advantage of unique longitudinal data on social interaction and fertility preferences from Kassena-Nankana district in Ghana to explore whether informal social interaction has an impact on desired fertility, independent of family planning programs

Research Questions

- Are there variations in fertility preferences by experimental design of family planning programs?
- Is social interaction associated with variations in fertility preferences?
- Are the effects of informal social interaction independent of family planning programs effects?

Setting

- Kassena-Nankana district located in north eastern part of Ghana
- Socio-cultural, ecological and economic attributes of the district more representative of the Sahel populations north of Ghana than coastal regions of West Africa, south of Ghana
- Population of about 150,000 under continuous demographic surveillance since 1993

Experimental Design

- Four-cell quasi experimental design testing relative impact of different types of family planning program strategies
- Cell 1 (Zurugelu exposure only): involve traditional social institutions in health planning and delivery
 - Cell 2 (Nurse outreach): Health nurses reassigned from sub-district clinics to village residences for door to door service delivery
 - Cell 3 (Zurugelu plus nurse outreach): approaches in cell 1 & 2 are pursued simultaneously
 - Cell 4 (Comparison area): standard Ministry of Health services only

Data and Methods

- Sample of 2631 currently and ever-married women successfully linked in two data points: Baseline in 1995 at the start of project intervention activities and follow-up in 1999
- Bivariate and logistic regression for binary outcome Outcome: Want more children in follow-up survey (1999) vs. want no more/undecided
- Main predictors: 1) Social interaction variables: encouraged to use FP by personal network, Personal network partner ever used modern method, ever discussed FP in network. 2) Experimental cells
- Covariates: Preferences in 1995, age, number of living children, education, ethnicity, religion and contraceptive use, all covariates assessed in 1995

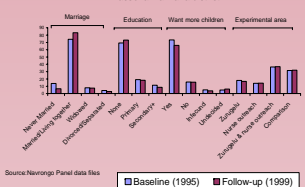
Descriptive Results

- Respondents interviewed in both surveys are comparable on most variables
- 3 out of 4 women were married, about two-thirds of women were illiterate, most respondents were located in the combined area of the experiment

Fertility preferences by experimental cell

- Preference for more children among women with at least three children, least likely to decline between surveys in comparison area than in other experimental areas
- Changes in preferences between surveys strongest in zurugelu only and nurse outreach areas

Percentage distribution of all women interviewed in 1995 and those interviewed in both 1995 and 1999, by selected characteristics, Kassena-Nankana district



Percent distribution of women with at least three children and desire for more children in the future, by experimental cell and year of survey, Kassena-Nankana district, 1995-1999



Fertility preferences by social interaction

- Preferences for more children among women seem to decrease between surveys by all social interaction variables.
- The most changes occur among women who know a network partner who has ever used FP

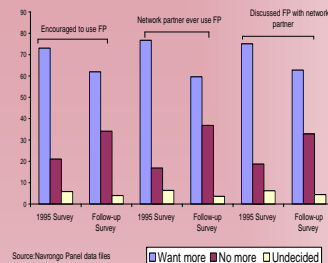
Multivariate Results

- No statistical significant impact of social interaction variables net of experimental design and other covariates
- Statistically significant negative impact of Zurugelu exposure on the probability of wanting more children compared to comparison area
- Age, number of living children and primary education negatively associated with wanting more children

Conclusions

- Findings of this study seem to suggest fertility behavior between the two surveys is largely a function of the Navrongo experiment than to informal social interaction among women
- Involving traditional social institutions in health planning and services seem effective in promoting preferences for smaller family sizes among women
- In general women are shifting towards smaller family sizes although decline in preferences comparatively modest to precipitate transition to low fertility

Percent distribution of social interaction variables and desire for more children by year of survey, 1995-1999, Kassena-Nankana district, Ghana



Predicted probability of wanting more children, 1995-1999, Kassena-Nankana district, Ghana

