3ie-IFPRI Joint Seminar:
Effects of a Social Network Diffusion Intervention on Family Planning Use and Unmet Need in Benin
09/22/2016

Kim Ashburn, from the Institute for Reproductive Health Georgetown University, presented her co-authored research paper, entitled "Using Social Networks to Promote Family Planning: Findings from Benin", at the 3ie-IFPRI joint seminar series in Washington D.C. on September 22. The study evaluates the Tékponon Jikuagou (TJ) intervention, which aimed to promote discussion on family planning perceptions, barriers, and use in 45 villages, through a network of influential groups and individuals. This 6-year USAID-funded project was implemented by a consortium of partners including CARE Bénin, Plan International, and the Institute for Reproductive Health Georgetown University.

The researchers use both a Coarsened Exact Matching (CEM) method and a logistic regression model to establish the matched group and to estimate the effect of the intervention on family planning (FP) outcomes related to use, access, and communication. The evaluators use a mixed-method study design, combining in-depth interviews and household surveys, to assess the impact of TJ. Thus, they administered a cross sectional survey before and after the intervention, for which a sample of 4320 women and men were equally represented and randomly selected from the intervention and control areas. Baseline and endline data were exploited to measure the effect of program exposure on FP outcomes. The CEM, known as a grouping matching method, was applied to define comparable groups between individuals exposed and those unexposed to the intervention. The estimated model reveals a positive and significant link between program exposure and key FP outcomes.

Dr. Ashburn's conclusions highlight the effectiveness of a social network approach on FP outcomes and described the strengths and limitations of the study. The radio broadcast, along with the influential groups and individuals, are persuasive strategies to promote public conversations about family planning. The intervention contributes to an improvement of couple's communication, an increase in FP use among women and met FP needs. She determined that the multicomponent intervention is likely successful because each component worked differently with women and men. However, the quasi experimental design is based on the level of program exposure, which was low, and didn't allow the evaluation team to build a strong counterfactual. Furthermore, she concluded that the study might be biased because of social desirability.

Anna Heard, from 3ie, served as the discussant. Dr. Heard pointed out the limitation of the matching method strategy based on the program exposure, arguing that there was an important risk of spillover and self-selection, which could undermine the validity of the counterfactual. Therefore, Dr. Heard recommended considering other matching method such as propensity score matching, which can be used as a predictor of PF outcomes. Also, she advised on using the intention to treat analysis in order to account for self-selection into exposure. The audience showed an interest in the social network framework and recommended considering the social network influence as the sampling strategy instead of the village randomization.