Is use of family planning contagious? Evidence of women's social network data from Rural North India

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Abstract:

Context: Uttar Pradesh continues to remain the most populous state of India in the 21st century. Although fertility has declined across several Indian states of late, with varying historical points of onset and pace of decline, women in Uttar Pradesh on average, still bear around four children in their reproductive lifetime due to the interplay of a complex set of socio-economic, demographic and cultural factors. However, little attempt has been made in the past to examine the role of diffusion, aside from the standard set of socioeconomic factors in influencing fertility change in the Indian context in general, and Uttar Pradesh in particular. Understanding the mechanism of diffusion perspective in precipitating fertility change may be crucial from a policy perspective.

Objective: Using a unique ego-centric social network data, the present study examine the informal interpersonal social network effect on the adoption of contraceptive and method choice among 567 currently married women in reproductive age groups living in Jaunpur district situated in the eastern part of Uttar Pradesh province in north India.

Data and Methods: The present paper is based on the primary data collected from Jaunpur district, situated in the eastern part of Uttar Pradesh, primarily as part of the doctoral work. The study employed the mixed-method approach for data collection. Semi-structured schedules were canvassed to collect information related to ego-centric social network, reproductive histories and contraceptive behaviour of around 567 currently married women in the age group of 18-35 years. Bivariate and multivariate techniques were employed for data analysis.

Results: Preliminary findings suggest that social interaction appears to be a significant predictor of contraceptive method use among women in rural Uttar Pradesh after adjusting for pertinent socio-economic and demographic covariates. Social learning emerged as an important mechanism through which women learn about the cost and benefits of small family size, side-effects associated with various methods and potential avenues of seeking family planning methods. Further, the structure of social networks also exerts strong influence eon contraceptive behavior of respondents. Women having dense social networks partners who do not use any family planning methods actually discourage respondents from using contraceptive methods.