

Are the young adolescents of today the family planning champions of tomorrow? Evidence from Burkina Faso

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Abstract

Young adults are often assumed to be more open to new ideas than older adults, placing them in the forefront of social change. This paper examines this assumption, using data from the 2015 PMA2020 survey in Burkina Faso. We discuss the differences in knowledge and attitudes towards family planning between adolescents at the beginning of their reproductive careers (15-24), and older women. Findings show that intentions to use family planning follow different patterns. While the youngest women are less likely to intend to use than young women who have progressed in their reproductive careers, they are more likely to use than women over 30. Although this suggests that reproductive innovation could emanate from young women, reproductive change is more likely to be subtle and gradual rather than overt and pronounced. Findings also highlight the need for family planning interventions to dissipate persistent rumors on health-related effects of modern methods.

Background

Previous projected number of contraceptive users showed that an important part of increased demand is due to a large cohort of young people (1.8 billion people, aged 10–24), who have already begun their reproductive careers (Stover et al., 2009; IPPF, 2011). Young people are marrying later, but age of first sex has not changed significantly, with the result that premarital sex is increasing (National Research Council, 2006). They want fewer children than their parents, but will only be able to realize their choices if they have access to appropriate services and contraception (Bankole et al., 2007; IPPF, 2011). Therefore, adolescents and young adults are often assumed to be more open to new ideas than older adults and are consequently believed to be in the forefront of social change. However, this proposition has not yet been sufficiently and formally investigated in the Sub-saharan african region. This paper examines differences in openness to innovative fertility behavior between young adults and their elders in a rural area of Burkina Faso. It tests the hypothesis that younger adults are more likely to exhibit openness to reproductive change than older adults.

In Burkinabe society, lineal values and norms exert considerable influence on fertility behavior. For this reason, it is often assumed that corporate lineal values explain the failure of family planning programs especially in rural areas because the social value of families to have many children represses innovative fertility behavior of individuals (Dozon 1986; Alain 1997).

Indeed, extended family through marriage is a critical value of Mossi culture (more than 52% of the population) and it is imbedded in a highly hierarchical and patriarchal lineal system termed the “*buudu*”. Marriage is an important process oriented towards perpetuating

lineal power through lineage alliance. And the lineage therefore exerts its power over adolescents in regards to their marriage and fertility behavior. In such a context, children progress directly from childhood to adulthood (Badini, 1994). Adolescents are valued mainly for their potential of fertility, and the social system has been built to maximize it by means of very early entry in union as well as early childbearing (Franck and Loco, 1990; Bledsoe and Cohen, 1993; Mensch et al. 1999; Guilla and Poirier, 2000; Brady et al., 2007; Sauvain-Dugerdil et al., 2008).

Nonetheless, evidence exists that, despite this influence of the lineage, adolescents can and do behave differently from their elders (Delaunay 1994; Mensch et al. 1999). Reflecting on changes that are occurring in sub-Saharan African society through marriage, Bledsoe noted that:

partner selection is becoming more a matter of personal choice than of family dictate, distant formality between spouses is being replaced by love and companionship, bridewealth -money or goods given to the woman's family by the man in exchange for her labor and reproductive services -is growing less common, and educated women or those with independent incomes can more easily divorce unsatisfactory husbands (Bledsoe 1990).

Studies of family planning behavior in Burkina Faso show that even though the prevalence of modern contraceptive use is progressing slowly (from 9% in 2003 to 15% in 2010), trends show a decline of unmet need for family planning among adolescents. Indeed, in 1998, unmet need for family planning was estimated to be 55 percent for women 15-19 years old and at 66 percent for women 20-24 years old while in 2010 it was estimated to be 21 and 24% respectively.

This paper uses the 2015 survey data from the PMA2020 research project in Burkina Faso to re-evaluate the hypothesis that adolescent are more likely to intend to use family planning than older adults. In the context of background factors, we examine differences in intention to use family planning between women in the beginning, middle, and end of their reproductive careers. The analysis aims to determine whether, in Burkina Faso, the young adolescents of today are likely to be at the vanguard of reproductive change.

Methodology

Data source

Data come from the Performance Monitoring and Accountability 2020 (PMA2020) project in Burkina Faso. PMA2020 is a five-year project that uses innovative mobile technology to support low-cost, rapid-turnaround, nationally-representative surveys to monitor key indicators of family planning. The project deploys a cadre of female resident enumerators trained in mobile-assisted data collection.

Study design

PMA2020/Burkina Faso used a two-stage cluster design with urban-rural strata. A sample of 53 enumeration areas (EAs) was drawn from the National Institute of Statistics master sampling frame. In each EA, 35 households were randomly selected. All eligible females of reproductive age (15-49) from the selected households were contacted and consented for interviews. Socio-demographic data relative to all households are collected. DHS type questionnaires are administered to all eligible women of reproductive age, to collect information about fertility preferences, knowledge, attitudes and practices concerning family planning, household characteristics, the timing and structure of marriage, and other reproductive health issues such as attitudes opinions on quality of family planning services. Data collection was conducted between May and June, 2015. The final sample included 2,198 females aged 15 to 49.

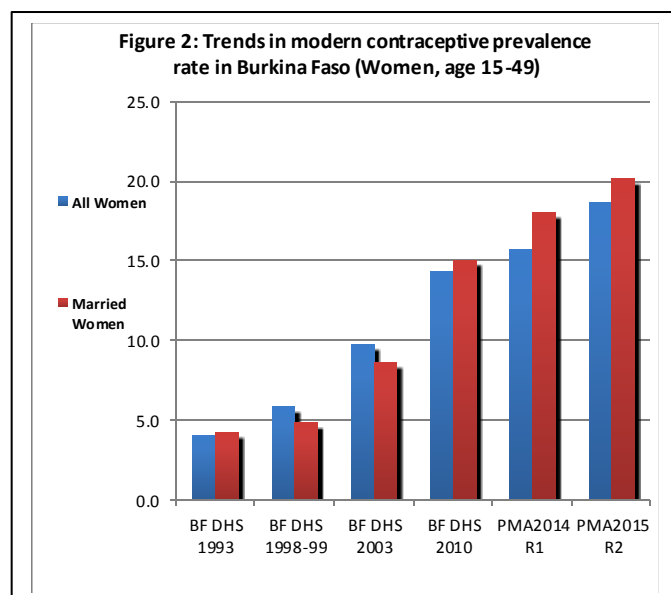
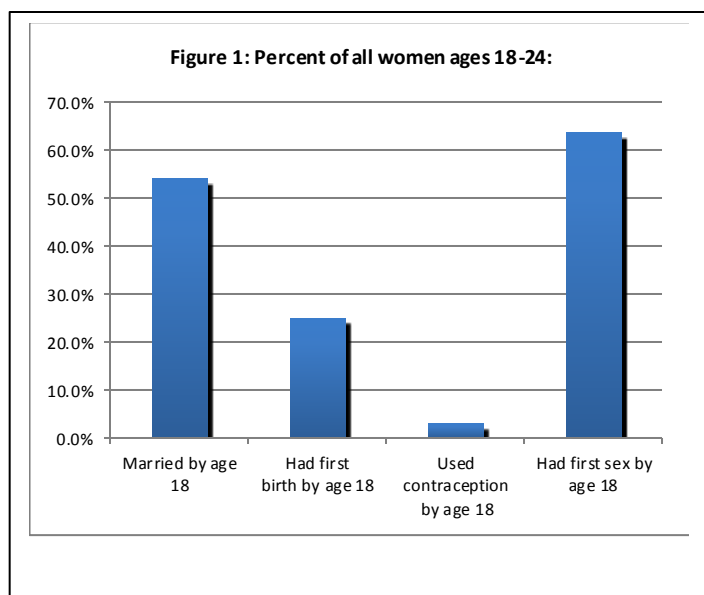
Analysis approach

Logit regression models of the determinants of intention to practice family planning were estimated. Separate models for those who are currently using a modern contraceptive method and for those who do not use assessed the effect of wives' age, awareness of family planning methods, personal preferences regarding length of birth spacing, and background characteristics including education, age at first use of FP, marital status, type of union, residence (urban, rural), and wealth quintile on intention to use family planning in the future.

Preliminary results

Preliminary results show that at national level, modern contraceptive prevalence rate among women in union has slightly progressed (Figure 1): from 15% in 2010 (DHS, 2010) to 20% in 2015 (PMA, 2015).

More than one in two adolescents (18-24) married by age 18 while 25% of them had their first birth by age 18. Results also show that contraceptive use is very low at the beginning of reproductive careers with only 3% of adolescents who used a modern contraceptive method by age 18.



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