Urban-Rural and Poverty-Related Inequalities in Health Status: *Spotlight on Rwanda*

Introduction

National surveys contain a wealth of family planning, reproductive health, and maternal and child health indicators. Comparing these indicators across subnational groups, such as urban versus rural populations or by relative poverty, can pinpoint inequalities and gaps in coverage and assist policymakers and program planners in developing more effective and efficient interventions.

In most developing countries, poverty is highly correlated with place of residence; that is, urban households tend to concentrate among the highest-wealth groups, while rural households tend to concentrate among the poor. Thus, any national comparison of the least poor with the most poor tends to compare the bulk of the urban population with the poorest of the rural poor, making it impossible to determine to what degree the findings reflect inequalities by wealth and/or inequalities by geography. The development of separate urban and rural wealth indices provides a way out of this dilemma.

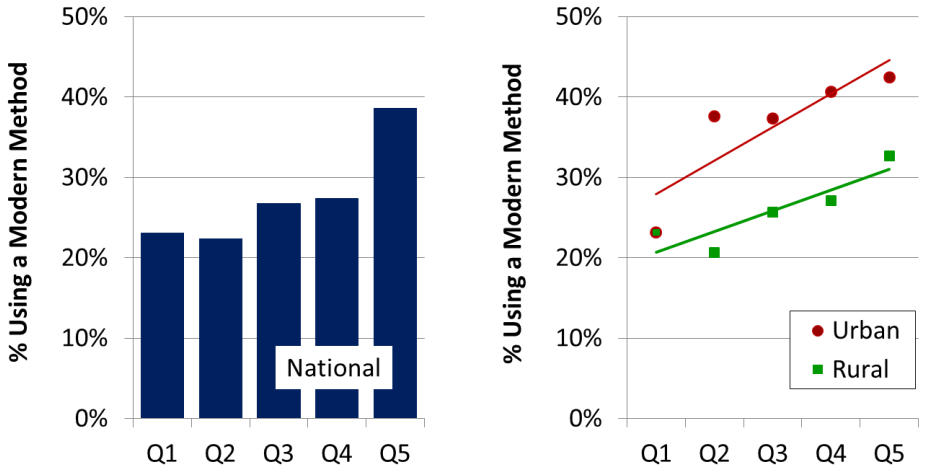
This fact sheet summarizes a few findings from secondary analyses of the Rwanda 2007/8 Interim Demographic and Health Survey (DHS). Separate wealth classifications for urban and rural women were constructed to examine inequalities in key population and reproductive health indicators, including family planning and antenatal care. The analyses demonstrate that disaggregating relative wealth by place of residence deepens understanding of national trends and the importance of examining multiple indicators.

Findings

Family Planning – National Quintiles vs. Residence-Disaggregated Quintiles

Figure 1 below compares use of modern contraceptives by national wealth quintiles with contraceptive use by urban- and rural-specific wealth quintiles. At the national level, use rises very slowly among the lowest four wealth quintiles, with only the wealthiest quintile showing higher contraceptive use. However, there are pronounced differences by wealth in urban areas, and rural areas are show consistently lower use than urban areas.

Figure 1: Poverty-related inequalities in modern contraceptive use

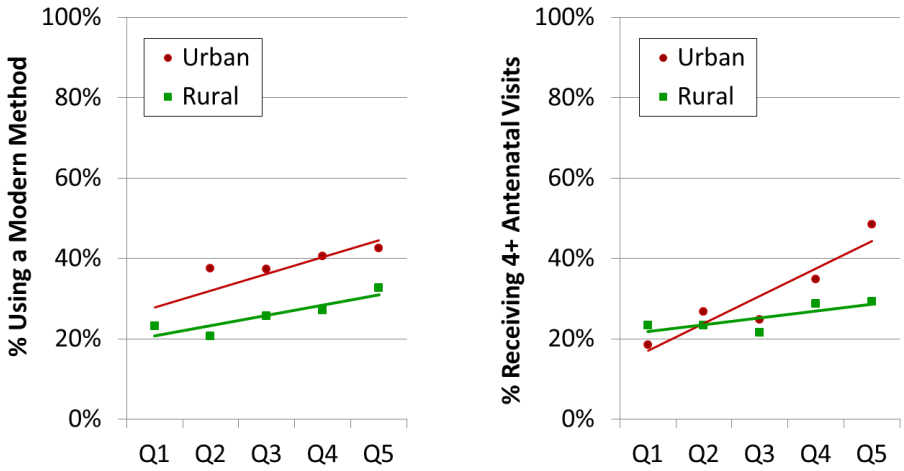


Family Planning vs. Antenatal Care

A potential ambiguity in interpreting differences in family planning is that use is affected not only by access to and ability to pay for modern contraceptives but also by women's interest in and motivation to regulate their fertility. In settings marked by cultural differences and/or variation in educational and economic opportunities for women and girls, it is possible that rural and poorer women want more children than their urban and wealthier counterparts.

Maternity care is a less ambiguous health outcome. Motivation for good outcomes (i.e., healthy mother and healthy child) is unlikely to be subject to cultural factors that may influence family planning. Figure 2 below compares use of modern contraception with adequate antenatal care for the last birth (four or more visits as recommended by WHO and UNICEF). Note that both family planning and antenatal care can be provided in non-clinical settings. Urban-rural and poverty differentials are clearly present for both contraception and antenatal care, and rural populations tend to show lower use of both services. In contrast to most countries in the region which show higher use of antenatal care than family planning, Rwanda shows comparably low levels of use of both services.

Figure 2: Contraceptive Use Compared to Antenatal Care



Considerations for program design

The findings presented above are only a few of the further analyses that could be conducted with the Rwanda 2007/8 Interim DHS.

- There is a clear need for improvement in both family planning and antenatal care, with special attention to the rural population.
- The relatively high levels of contraception among urban women in all but the lowest wealth quintile suggest that family planning is becoming socially accepted.
- Urban areas would benefit from family planning interventions targeted to the poor, while in rural areas a more generalized family planning approach may be indicated.
- Antenatal care should be a top health priority, as all groups fall short of the Millennium Development Goals. As the maternal child health program expands, program planners and managers might be advised to look for ways to integrate family planning and antenatal care.

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