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Strengthening Family Planning Project

تعزيز تنظيم الأسرة

Research Study Brief:

Does Counseling Women and Couples Increase Family Planning Uptake in Jordan?

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Does Counseling Women and Couples Increase Family Planning Uptake in Jordan?

Summary

In Jordan, family planning counseling has been a key component of the strategy of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) to address low and stagnant modern contraceptive prevalence rates, estimated at 42% according to the 2012 Demographic Health Survey. The program consists of a series of home-based counseling visits conducted by trained community health workers (CHWs) to offer counseling on modern contraceptive method use, benefits, and side effects.

Globally, family planning programs often focus solely on women and neglect to include men. Existing research on the effects of male involvement in family planning counseling generally points to positive effects relative to counseling women alone, with mixed evidence in some settings.

To examine these issues in the Jordanian context, the Strengthening Family Planning project conducted a three-armed randomized controlled trial to evaluate the impact of family planning counseling on family planning outcomes and to examine whether impacts differ for couples counseling as compared with women-only counseling.

The study found that:

- Offering in-home family planning counseling increased uptake of modern contraceptive methods by 48% in the women-only counseling group and 59% in the couples' counseling group. The difference in impacts between the women only and couples' group was not statistically significant.
- Counseling women alone or couples resulted in lower use of traditional methods and fewer concerns about modern methods' side effects compared with no counseling.
- Participation in counseling was substantially lower in the couples' counseling group, due to husbands' lack of availability and refusal to receive visits.
- Lower participation rates among couples diluted the overall impact of the couples counseling. Considering impacts on fully-participating individuals only, the increase in modern method uptake was 52% in the women-only group and 85% in the couples' group compared with no counseling.

Methods

The study was conducted in a low-income area in Amman. The sample consisted of 1,247 married non-pregnant women of reproductive age living with their husbands and not using any modern contraceptive method at the time of sample selection. After completion of a baseline survey, women

were randomly assigned to one of three groups: those offered counseling alone, those offered counseling with their husbands, and those not offered counseling.

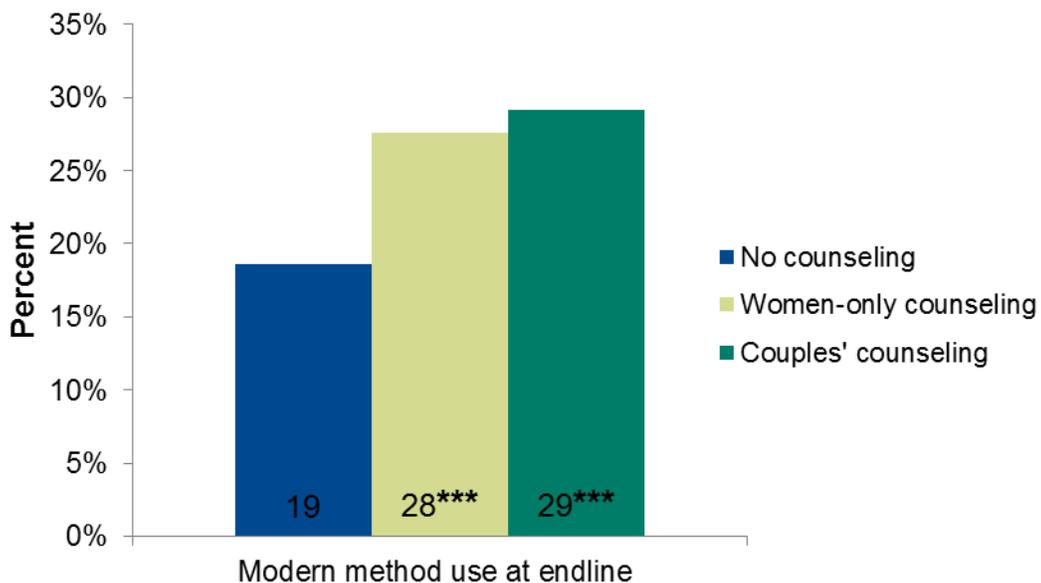
Over the course of five months, CHWs conducted monthly counseling visits in homes. During visits, CHWs discussed the woman's or couple's plans regarding spacing or limiting pregnancies and offered counseling on modern methods. They answered questions about specific methods and offered a free voucher for family planning services. Approximately six months after the baseline survey, both women and their husbands were interviewed separately for an endline survey.

This study was approved by the Abt Associates Inc. Institutional Review Board. Free and informed consent was obtained from all study participants.

Findings

Offering in-home family planning counseling had a positive and significant impact on uptake of modern contraceptive methods. Twenty-eight percent of women in the women-only counseling group and 29% of women in the couples counseling group reported using a modern contraceptive at endline, compared with 19% of women in the no-counseling group (Figure 1). These differences correspond to 48% and 59% gains in modern method uptake, respectively, in the two counseling groups compared with the no-counseling group. The difference in impacts between the women-only and couples' groups was not statistically significant.

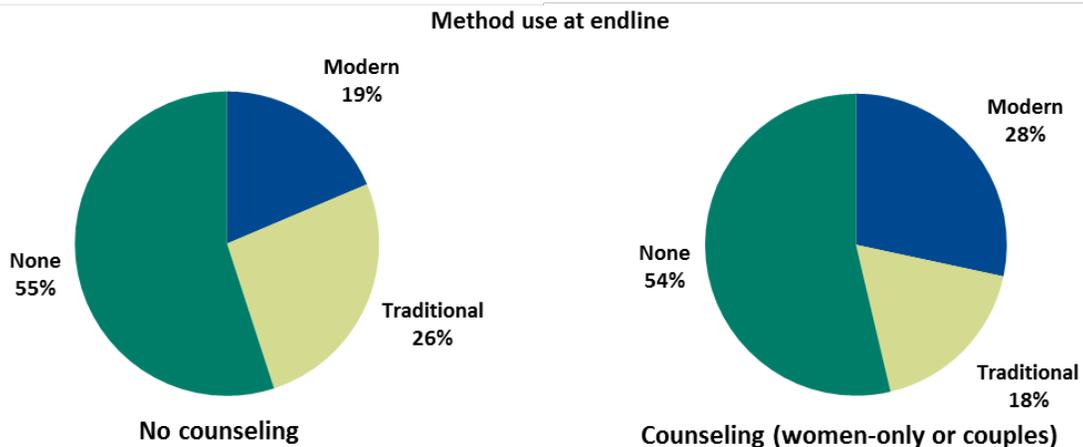
Figure 1: Counseling had a positive impact on uptake of modern methods



*** Indicates that the difference with the no-counseling group is significant at the 99% level ($p < 0.01$). The difference between women-only and couples counseling is not statistically significant at traditional confidence levels.

Counseling women alone or couples resulted in lower use of traditional methods and fewer concerns about modern methods’ side effects compared with no counseling. Use of family planning methods of any type at endline was similar in the women-only and couples counseling groups combined compared with the no-counseling group (Figure 2). This is because the increase in use of modern methods was offset by a reduction in the use of traditional methods: 18% in both counseling groups combined used traditional methods compared with 26% in the no-counseling group. In addition, 49% of women in the counseling groups cited concerns about modern methods’ side effects compared with 58% of women in the no-counseling group (not shown). Counseling thus reduced one important barrier to modern method uptake. However, even with counseling, concerns about side effects persisted.

Figure 2: Counseling resulted in lower use of traditional methods



Participation in counseling was substantially lower in the couples’ counseling group due to husbands’ lack of availability and refusal to receive visits. Among women assigned to women-only counseling, 89% participated in at least one counseling visit (Table 1). In the couples counseling group, only 63% of couples received the first counseling visit. The primary reasons for this discrepancy were husbands’ lack of availability (15%) and refusal to take part in the visits (7%). CHWs targeting couples reported substantial logistical challenges in reaching the husbands at the first visit. Subsequently, few husbands in the couples counseling group (14%) participated in follow-up counseling visits.

Table 1: Participation in counseling

	Women-only counseling (N=417)	Couples’ counseling (N=416)
Completed visit 1	89%	63%
Husband not available	--	15%
Husband refused	1%	7%
Wife refused	3%	5%

Lower participation rates among couples diluted the impact of couples counseling. With full participation, modern method uptake in the couples’ group was 35% compared with 28% in the women-only group. These effects may reflect that men who participate in counseling may be more likely to accept modern methods. While this difference in impact between the women-only and the couples

group is larger in magnitude than the results that are not adjusted for participation, the difference is still not significant at traditional confidence levels.

Community health worker in Jordan explaining family planning methods during home visit



Program Implications

This randomized controlled trial demonstrated that home-based family planning counseling as implemented in Jordan had a strong positive impact on uptake of modern contraceptive methods. Counseling was most effective in influencing choice of family planning method, moving users away from traditional methods and toward modern methods. These positive gains provide evidence that one-on-one counseling and interpersonal communication in the Jordanian context are effective strategies for improving family planning behavior. They also justify continued investments in the long-standing USAID-funded Jordan counseling program.

The study revealed that counseling women alone or couples reduced concerns about methods' side effects, an important barrier to uptake among Jordanian women. However, even with counseling, concerns persisted. Program implementers need to understand the source of these concerns and adapt the counseling protocol accordingly. Family planning providers should also be encouraged to provide routine counseling on management of side effects and reinforce messages related to methods' safety.

The study found that lower participation rates among couples diluted the overall impact of the couples counseling. In reality, men's busy work schedules and some men's unwillingness to take part in counseling posed implementation challenges that undermined the overall potential effectiveness of the couples' program. Implementers need to consider more effective and appealing means to increase men's involvement and participation in family planning initiatives.