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The Media or the Message? Experimental Evidence on Mass Media and Modern Contraception Uptake in Burkina Faso¹

March 5, 2021

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CSAE Working Paper WPS/2021-04

Abstract

Mass media can spread information and disinformation, but its impact is hard to rigorously measure. Using a two-level randomized controlled trial covering 5 million people, we test both exposure to mass media (with 1,500 women receiving radios) and the impact of a high-quality, intensive 2.5 year, family planning mass media campaign in Burkina Faso (8 of 16 local radio stations received the campaign). We find women who received a radio in noncampaign areas induced contraception use by 5.2 percentage points ($p=0.009$) and had more conservative gender attitudes. In contrast, modern contraceptive use rose 5.9 percentage points ($p=0.046$) in campaign areas and 5.5 percentage points ($p=0.000$) among those given radios in campaign areas. Births fell 10%. The campaign changed beliefs about contraception but not preferences, and encouraged existing users to use more consistently. We estimate the nationwide campaign scale-up led to 225,000 additional women using modern contraception, at a cost of US\$7.7 per additional user.

JEL codes: J13, J16, L82

Keywords: Mass Media Campaign, Radio, Modern Contraception, Family Planning, RCT.

¹ We thank Pabla Cordova-Bukari, Sarah Deschamps, Layane El Hach, Shoun-Jin, Victor Ouedraogo, Emile Pita, Adama Sankoh, Ousmane Sany, Rebecca Toulé, and the IPA team in Burkina Faso for outstanding research assistance and project management. We are also grateful for the input we received from Mirielle Belen, Ray Head, Jennifer Hollowell, Bousso Kigane, Sylvain Kossou, Matthew Lomas, Kate Nelson, Tessa Swigart, the DMI Burkina Faso team and members of the independent project steering committee (John Cleland, Malinda Potts, Rose C. Coates, Bruce Kirgiste, Andrea Gashi, Bessie Kalamé). The study protocol received approval from MET Institutional Review Board (id: 1510264731A001) and from the Burkina Faso's Ethical committee for health studies (id: 2017043). The research for this paper was funded by Maximal Development Innovation Ventures (USAID) and Global Innovation Fund. The study was pre-registered on AEA social science registry (<https://www.aearegistry.org>) with the ID: AEAREG-0000002 and on clinicalTrials.gov with the ID: NCT02714616. The findings, interpretations, and conclusions expressed in this paper, and all errors, are entirely ours.

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Mass media can spread information and disinformation, but its impact is hard to rigorously measure. Using a two-level randomized evaluation covering 5 million people, we test both exposure to mass media (with 1,500 women receiving radios) and the impact of a high-quality, intensive 2.5 year, family planning mass media campaign in Burkina Faso (8 of 16 local radio stations received the campaign). We find women who received a radio in

noncampaign areas reduced contraception use by 5.2 percentage points ($p=0.039$) and had more conservative gender attitudes. In contrast, modern contraceptive use rose 5.9 percentage points ($p=0.046$) in campaign areas and 5.8 percentage points ($p=0.030$) among those given radios in campaign areas. Births fell 10%. The campaign changed beliefs about contraception but not preferences, and encouraged existing users to use more consistently. We estimate the nationwide campaign scale-up led to 225,000 additional women using modern contraception, at a cost of US\$7.7 per additional user.

May 05, 2021