

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

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.

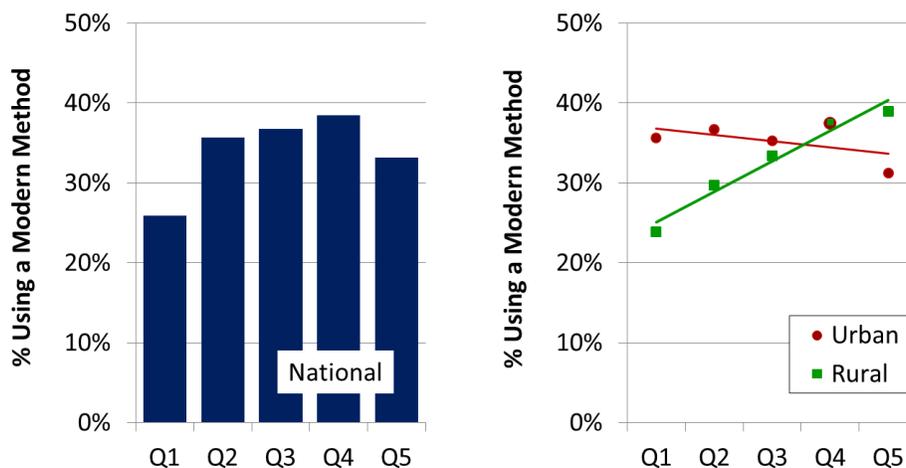
This fact sheet summarizes a few findings from secondary analyses of the Philippines 2008 Demographic and Health Survey (DHS). Separate wealth classifications for urban and rural women were constructed to examine inequalities in key population and reproductive health indicators, including family planning and antenatal care. The analyses demonstrate that disaggregating relative wealth by place of residence may reveal patterns obscured by 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. Behind the national trends of generally increasing contraception with increasing wealth are striking urban-rural differences: rural women show a steep gradient by increasing wealth while urban women show oscillating contraceptive use by wealth groups. The decline in modern method use among the wealthiest urban women is due to non-use of any method.

Figure 1: Poverty-related inequalities in modern contraceptive use

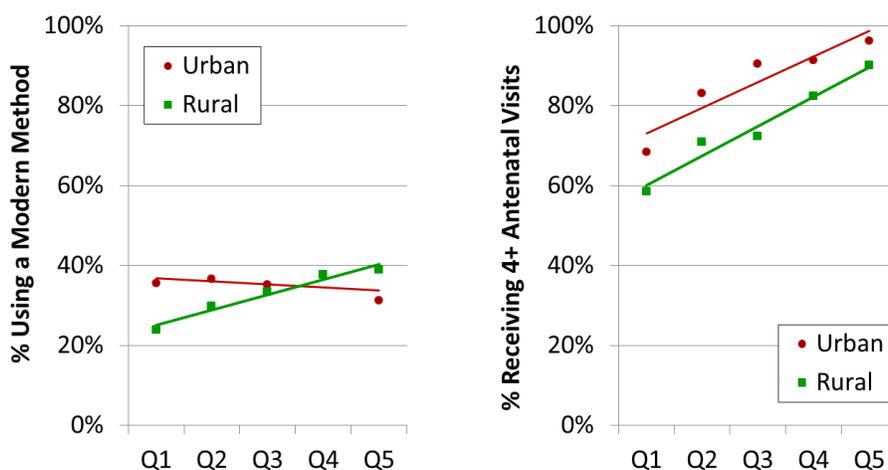


Family Planning vs. Antenatal Care

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 more clear-cut for antenatal care than for family planning. Only the lowest 20% of urban women report sub-optimal antenatal care, compared to 60% of rural women.

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 Philippines 2008 DHS.

- The higher rates of non-use of any contraception observed among the highest wealth quintile are confined largely to urban women. This warrants closer examination.
- Rural women may benefit from pro-poor family planning targeting.
- In light of the markedly higher use of antenatal care compared to family planning, program planners and managers might be advised to look for ways to integrate family planning and antenatal care, especially in poorer rural areas where family planning use is particularly low.
- Further analyses could examine factors associated with use of traditional methods, which is relatively high in the Philippines. It is striking to note that a third of current family planning users use traditional methods, while only fewer than one in five non-users who intend to use a method in the future express a preference for traditional methods.

This country brief was made possible by support from the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) under the terms of Cooperative Agreement GPO-A-00-08-00003-00 and GPO-A-00-09-00003-00 MEASURE Evaluation PRH Associate Award. The opinions expressed are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of USAID or the United States government