Evaluating the Impact of Gender Policies – Opportunities for RCTs

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Presentation Overview

- Impact Evaluation within an M&E system
- Blueprint for a simple RCT
- Three examples from South Asia
- What we can do with Rigorous Impact Evaluations
RCTs work alongside other M&E tools
The Specific Challenge for Impact Evaluation

- Impact evaluation seeks to find out if a programme or policy caused any change for the people it was intended to serve.

- To do this well, we need to compare what happened to people who received a programme with what would have happened to the same people over the same time period without the programme.
  - It is impossible to do! So we need an estimate of what would have happened.

- The most rigorous evidence gets the estimate closest to the truth.
  - “Random assignment” creates groups of people that are the same on average.
  - The flip of a coin rather than personal characteristics, individual opportunities, etc. determines who gets the programme.
  - Differences we observe later can be safely attributed to the program.

- Sometimes random assignment happens naturally and sometimes it has to be created.
Blueprint for a Simple RCT

- Outline a Theory of Change or Logical Framework (Inputs → Outputs → Outcomes)
- Determine Sample Size & Select Sample
- Conduct “Baseline” Survey
- Randomly Assign Individuals to Groups (Treatment or Comparison)
- Implement Program
- Conduct “Endline” Survey
- Calculate Difference in Outcome Variable between Groups
- …Use Results
Examples of Research and Areas of Opportunity

- Categorized by approach or tool:
  - Increasing economic or political opportunities
  - Giving incentives or disincentives
  - Improving and accessing the external environment
  - Changing attitudes toward girls and women (and girls’ and women’s attitudes about themselves)
Example 1: Increasing Economic Opportunities

- J-PAL affiliate Jensen studied the impact of job opportunities for young women in northern India.

- **Partner:** Management Development Institute

- **Theory of change:** With more opportunities for women to earn income, young women will:
  - Invest more in job-relevant skills
  - Delay marriage and childbirth (due to change in opportunity costs)
Evaluation Design

**Sample:** 160 villages where BPO recruiters do not normally go because they are a little far from Delhi

T: Send BPO recruiters to the village

C: Do nothing new
Results

The recruiting services helped young women find jobs.

- Women aged 18 to 24 in treatment villages were 4.6 percentage points more likely to be employed in the BPO sector than their peers in the comparison villages
- 2.4 percentage points more likely to work at all for pay outside the home

Parents invested more in their daughters’ education & nutrition/health.

- 5 percentage point increase in school enrollment for girls.
- It also increased girls’ body mass index (BMI).

Young women’s career aspirations changed.

- Women from treatment villages expressed a greater desire to work for pay throughout their lives, even long after marriage and childbirth.

Young women significantly delayed marriage and childbearing.

- 5 to 6 percentage points less likely to get married or to have given birth over the three-year period of the intervention.
Example 2: Giving Incentives or Disincentives

- In Bangladesh, affiliates Field & Glennerster are studying the impact of a program that gives incentives to delay marriage until the legal age.

- **Partner:** Save the Children

- **Theory of change:** compensating families for the extra dowry they would have to pay will allow them to delay their daughters’ marriage.

- **Target Population:** 15-17 year olds
Evaluation Design

- **Sample**: 460 villages

- **Random Assignment**: 307 villages have been randomly selected to receive one of four intervention packages. The remaining 153 villages will serve as the comparison group.
Incentive Packages

- **Group 1 – Status Quo**
  - **Basic**: literacy and numeracy training or study support along with social competency training on health, rights, and general negotiation and social skills.

- **Group 2**
  - **Livelihoods**: basic + entrepreneurial and budgeting skills.

- **Group 3**
  - **Full**: livelihoods + approximately 16 liters of cooking oil per year, on the condition that the girl remains unmarried until the legal age of 18.

- **Group 4**
  - **Delayed marriage**: only the cooking oil.

- This study is ongoing.
Example 3: Improving & Accessing the External Environment

- Affiliates Oster & Thornton studied the impact of giving menstrual cups to adolescent girls in Nepal.
  - According to some estimates girls were missing 10% to 20% of schooldays because of menstruation.

- **Partner:** Institute for Social and Environmental Research - Nepal

- **Theory of change:** Lack of convenient hygiene products makes menstruation a barrier to education. Providing easily cleaned, reusable technology will allow girls to attend more and learn more.

- **Target Population:** 7th and 8th standard girls & their mothers
Evaluation Design

- **Sample:** 198 adolescent girls from 4 schools & their mothers

- **Random Assignment:** After a meeting and discussion, the organizers held a lottery and some of the girls were later given free menstrual cups.
Results: Usage

**Figure 2:** Share of girls experimenting with cup and using cup over time.
Results: Education & Time Use

School attendance data came from three sources

- Girls’ reports in time-use diaries and calendars they kept for the study
- School attendance records
- Surprise visits to schools

Cup did not reduce amount of school missed due to menstruation!

- On days when they were not menstruating, girls attended school 85.7 percent of the time, compared to 83 percent of the time during their periods.
- Only about ½ day per year school missed due to menstruation.

Treatment group girls spent less time on laundry.

No effect on other daily activities, self-reported gynecological infections, or self-esteem indicators.
There was broad consensus on the idea that menstrual hygiene was a barrier to education.

Impact evaluation uncovered a different reality.

Missing school because of menstruation was itself a small problem.
Conclusion: Rigorous Impact Evaluation Benefits

- There are potentially so many ways to improve outcomes for girls and women...

- Rigorous evidence helps establish which are the most cost effective and should be prioritized.

- Can also uncover myths and help us avoid putting resources into solutions that sound very reasonable to all of us but do not work for girls or women.

Thank You!