Using confidants to learn about abortion

CLÉMENTINE ROSSIER, UNIVERSITY OF GENEVA

ISSP-UNFPA EXPERT GROUP MEETING: POPULATION DATA FOR THE 21ST CENTURY: ADVANCES IN DATA COLLECTION METHODOLOGIES, 4-6 DEC 2019
Aknowledgements

Onikepe Owolabi, Guttmacher Institute
Caron Kim and Bela Ganatra, WHO
Dennis Feehan, UC Berkeley
Moussa Zan, University of Geneva
Rationale and origin of the confidants' method

- Abortions are underreported in surveys, especially in contexts where access to abortion services is restricted
- Rossier et al (2006): ethnographic observations in Burkina Faso: women share information about their clandestine abortion
  - to close relations trusted to keep a secret
  - to people who share the same secret: recent abortion seekers and providers

⇒ Why? In order to be locate and access underground abortion services
- Idea: ask survey respondents about the abortions of their close female relations to collect quantitative data on abortion

⇒ Confidants' method also called the Anonymous Third Party Reporting (ATPR) method

Rossier C., G. Guiella, A. Ouédraogo, B. Thiéba. 2006. « Estimating clandestine abortion with the confidants’ method. Results from Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso », Social Science and Medicine, 62(1):254-266
How does it work?

Network generator: women you share secrets with?

**Intimate female relations**
- Sisters
- Cousins
- Nieces
- Daughters
- Neighbors
- Friends
- Colleagues
- Aunts
- Mothers
- Sisters-in-law
- Other

Another version (2011) for women 15-24, Malawi: "best friend", limited to one

Abortions in the past 3 years
Circumstances under which they occurred

A paradigm shift in abortion safety

- Over the three last decades, abortion methods have changed dramatically with the diffusion of medical abortion even in countries where abortion is illegal
- Decrease in abortion mortality and in severe complications
- Shift in the thinking about safety: some abortion in restrictive countries are now safe (Ganatra et al. 2014)

⇒ need to document the continuum of safety in each country
⇒ need to have detailed information on abortion at the population-level (not only those who arrive as complications in hospitals)

The confidants method becomes popular

- **Application in one study by the Guttmacher Institute in seven countries**
  
  Not published yet; Ghana, Indonesia, Uganda, Ethiopia, Nigeria, Cote d’Ivoire and Rajasthan (India)

- **Application in one study by John Hopkins in three countries**
  
  

- **Application in another study by Guttmacher Institute in Ethiopia and Uganda**
  

Four major problems with the confidants /ATPR

Problem 1: CONTEXT. Are the ATPR suited to collect data on abortion in all contexts? Where do people talk to their friends about abortion? An early ATPR experiment failed in India...

Problem 2. TIE DEFINITION. "Person you share secrets with", "Best friend"? 1, 2.. More? Early ATPR experiments show: small samples of ties, many women do not have intimate female relations, not always representative (Helleringer et al. 2019) + The "secret sharing" Q may be biased towards abortion seekers.

Problem 3. BIASES. Potential "barrier" and "transmission" biases: if their size is non-negligible, how can we measure them? Correct for them?

=> Problem 4. GOLD STANDARD. To answer these three questions

Study objectives

- Study initiated by the WHO
- Provide a validated ATPR toolkit containing:
  - a procedure to decide whether a context is appropriate (problem 1)
  - a validated network generating question (problem 2)
  - an estimate of the two biases that can be adjusted to each context
  + a method to apply these corrections to ATPR estimates (problem 3)
Study design

- Two Health and Demographic Surveillances Systems
  - Kaya in Burkina Faso (rural)
  - Nairobi in Kenya (urban)
- Gold standard: Respondent Driven Sampling (RDS) to obtain a representative sample of abortion seekers in the sites through chain referral
- Random survey, 2000 women, improved ATPR module

Solution 1: An qualitative pilot

- A qualitative study before implementing the ATPR / confidants to assess:
  - Can abortion services be accessed anonymously?
  - Is stigma so strong that abortion seekers cannot confide to close network members?
  - Do abortion seekers rely on their social network to locate providers and methods?
Solution 2: Test another network generator

- Burt’s (1984) first proposed a one-item name generator instrument for the General Social Survey to capture close ties ("people you discuss personal matters with")

- The GSS shifted to "important matters" to have more diverse ties

  “From time to time, most people discuss important matters with other people. Looking back over the last six months – who are the people with whom you discussed matters important to you? Just tell me their first names or initials…” (GSS 2004).

- Validated internationally but interviewer effects (quality monitoring!)

- Number of ties collected: only a matter of budget constraints => test the implication on estimates
Solution 3: Generalized NSUM

- A Respondent Driven Sampling to measure directly the biases once, research how to adapt them to different contexts.
- We use the fact the ATPR = NSUM (with different tie definition).
- The generalized NSUM approach allows us to correct the transmission and barrier biases.

\[
N_H = \left( \frac{y_{F,H}}{d_{U,F}} \right) \times \left( \frac{1}{d_{F,F}/d_{U,F}} \right) \times \left( \frac{1}{d_{H,F}/d_{F,F}} \right) \times \left( \frac{1}{\bar{v}_{H,F}/\bar{d}_{H,F}} \right) = \left( \frac{y_{F,H}}{\bar{v}_{H,F}} \right).
\]  

Solution 4. Using the RDS for abortion? Challenges

- Several assumptions for RDS (Heckathorn 1997)
- BUT Abortion seekers do not seem to necessarily have direct "common practice" connections to other women who experienced that event
- Rather, abortion seekers seem to talk to their friends to find a knowledgeable person (i.e. often another abortion seeker) who can direct them to a person or a provider
Exploratory statistical work to assess alternative RDS sampling strategy for abortion

We explored a variations in how the RDS sampling is done by asking some hidden population members to refer others who are not in the hidden population, but who are in a group that is highly connected to the hidden population (social referent), thus stepping beyond and then back into the hidden population.

Conventional RDS

Multiplex RDS

=> Multiplex not worse than classic RDS

Simulation study done in R
200 simulated networks
Next steps

- Fieldwork starts in February 2020
- Stay tuned!