Do Teenagers Respond to HIV Risk Information? Evidence from a Field Experiment in Kenya

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Abstract

We use a randomized experiment to test whether and what information changes teenagers’ sexual behavior in Kenya. Providing information on the relative risk of HIV infection by partner’s age led to a 28 percent decrease in teen pregnancy, an objective proxy for the incidence of unprotected sex. Self-reported sexual behavior data suggests substitution away from older (riskier) partners and toward same-age partners. In contrast, the official abstinence-only HIV curriculum had no impact on teen pregnancy. These results suggest that teenagers are responsive to risk information, but their sexual behavior is more elastic on the intensive than on the extensive margin.

Gender Connection | Gender Focused Intervention
Gender Outcomes | Reproductive health
IE Design | Clustered Randomized Control Trial (Clustered at school level)

Intervention

164 of the 328 primary schools were selected to receive the Teacher Training on HIV/AIDS curriculum from the AIDS Control Unit of the Ministry of Education. The treatment provided teachers a multiple week in-service training to three teachers per school. The relative risk campaign first asked students to complete an anonymous survey on how much they know about the distribution of HIV in the Kenyan population. They then watched a video about "sugar daddies" and discussed the self-reported and actual distribution of HIV in Kenya.

Intervention Period | The training occurred over four months from February 2003 to May 2003. The Relative Risk campaign was phased in from July 2004 to October 2004.
Sample population | There were 328 primary schools included in the experiment. 163 were randomly selected for treatment 1: the teacher training on the national HIV/AIDS curriculum, which focuses on abstinence only. 71 schools received Treatment 2, the relative risk treatment.
Comparison conditions | State sponsored teacher training and control (no teacher training)
Unit of analysis | Individual Level
Evaluation Period | There were home follow us in August and September 2005, and information on childbearing in July 2005.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Results</th>
<th>The relative risk program led to a 28% decrease in teen pregnancy within a year. Pregnancies that were averted would have been with much older partners. Additionally, the relative risk intervention led to increased self-reported sexual activity among teenage boys suggesting a substitution from older to younger sexual partners.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Primary study limitations</td>
<td>Because the survey data is anonymous it is impossible to test whether the treatment effect varied with prior belief.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Funding Source</td>
<td>The World Bank</td>
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<td>Microdata</td>
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