Lasting and Novel Impacts of a Multi-level Adolescent Norms-shifting Sexual and Reproductive Health Intervention: Five-year Longitudinal Cohort Findings from Kinshasa

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BACKGROUND

Very young adolescents (VYAs - ages 10-14 years) undergo rapid physical, social, and cognitive change as they enter puberty1. They also face societal norms about gender and sexuality that shape their attitudes and behaviors related to sexual and reproductive health (SRH) throughout life2.

In Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), less than one in five sexually active girls ages 15-19 years use a modern contraceptive and about 13% have already given birth or have been pregnant3.

In response, the Growing Up GREAT! intervention was designed to reach VYAs during this critical developmental period to improve SRH and foster gender-equitable attitudes across the life course.

METHODS

We used a quasi-experimental longitudinal design and difference-in-differences analysis to compare trends in outcome indicators between intervention and control groups between baseline (W1) and follow-up at four subsequent waves (W2-W5). Each cohort was divided into two subgroups: in-school (IS) and out-of-school (OOS) adolescents.

Data were collected as part of the Global Early Adolescence Study (GEAS), a multi-country longitudinal study exploring gender socialization and its implications for adolescent health and wellbeing.

Quantitative surveys examined VYAs’ social context, health-related topics, gender attitudes, behaviors and norm perceptions. Additional questions were added as adolescents aged to assess pregnancy, contraceptive use and empowerment.

We stratified analysis by school status (IS and OOS) and sex. Results are based on intention-to-treat analysis.

Growing Up GREAT! is a multi-level gender-transformative sexual and reproductive health (SRH) program for VYAs in Kinshasa, DRC. It was piloted September 2017 to May 2018 in the communes of Masina and Kimbanseke amongst male and female in-school and out-of-school VYAs, as well as their parents and community members.

RESEARCH AIM

Evaluate the longitudinal impact of Growing Up GREAT! (GUG) among VYAs on four intermediate outcomes:

1) Puberty and SRH knowledge and attitudes
2) Assets and agency
3) Bullying and other forms of violence
4) Gender-equitable attitudes and behaviors

FINDINGS

Puberty and SRH Knowledge and Attitudes

- Knowledge about where to get information about menstruation and HIV knowledge improved for both IS and OOS three months post intervention (W2), and the effect was sustained for IS adolescents at W3.
- Pregnancy-related knowledge increased among IS and OOS adolescents at W2, however this gain was sustained only for the IS adolescents at W4 and W5.
- Embarrassment about accessing contraception decreased among OOS girls three months post intervention as well as one-and-two years post intervention.

Assets and Agency

- Novel impact on body satisfaction among IS adolescents two-years post intervention.
- Sustained impact on feelings of connectedness with caregivers for OOS adolescents, while for IS adolescents this was observed at W2 and W4.
- Communication about contraception increased more among OOS girls and younger IS adolescents receiving the intervention relative to the control, and this effect was sustained for younger OOS adolescents at W3 and W5.

Bullying and Other Forms of Violence

- Decrease in teasing, bullying and physical violence among older IS adolescents, two-years post intervention. However, this positive finding was not sustained.
- Short-term impact on OOS adolescent perpetration of teasing, bullying and physical violence were not sustained one-, two-, or three-years post-intervention.

Gender-equitable Attitudes and Behaviors

- Sustained improvements in attitudes towards gender equality in household chores for both IS and OOS adolescents over time.
- Improvements in gender-equitable chore sharing (reported by girls) among younger IS adolescents one-year post intervention (W3) but faded by W5.
- Three-years post intervention (W5), IS adolescents were less likely to endorse the sexual double standard, (rewarded boys for sexuality and sanctioned girls) and gender stereotypical roles (e.g., men as breadwinners).

REFERENCES