

REDUCING KENYAN FEMALE VULNERABILITY TO HIV DREAMS SEASON 2 FINDINGS

Keeping girls in school is a key method of reducing their vulnerability to HIV.

Women in Kenya are particularly vulnerable to HIV infection, with a national HIV prevalence rate of 7%, versus 4.7% for men (2015, HIV Estimate report). Especially at risk are adolescent girls and young women (15-24 years old), who account for 21% of new infections.

One factor that can dramatically reduce young women's vulnerability to HIV infection is to keep girls in secondary school. For example, a 2015 study in Botswana found that for girls with ten years of education instead of just nine, the risk for HIV infection was reduced by nearly half.

Therefore, we conjointly produced a programme to reduce girls' vulnerability to HIV by keeping them in school.

Interactive Radio as a Platform for Evidence-based Social Change Programming

Building on previous work, Africa's Voices Foundation implemented a communication for development (C4D) and social research initiative to investigate barriers towards Kenyan girls completing secondary school.

After successful completion of one season of interactive radio shows, Africa's Voices continued its partnership with Trocaire to launch a second season of radio shows. The show was designed to elicit audience feedback to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the socio-cultural and gender-based beliefs that prevent girls staying in or returning to secondary school?
2. What do communities believe makes adolescent girls vulnerable to HIV infection?

To answer these questions, AVF ran four radio shows to identify community beliefs around four relevant subtopics .

METHOD AND PARTICIPATION



2 radio stations



4 radio show topics



1,184 participants per radio show (average)

Topic 1: HIV Vulnerability

1,074 participants

65.9% MALE



34.1% FEMALE

Radio audiences were asked:

"In your opinion, what are the reasons for this high rate of HIV infection?"

Topic 2: HIV Stigma

634 participants

65.2% MALE



34.8% FEMALE

Radio audiences were asked:

"Do you think [a girl infected with HIV] should tell her teachers about her status? Yes/No? Why?"

Topic 3: Cross-Generational Relationships

1,786 participants

64.1% MALE



35.9% FEMALE

Radio audiences were asked:

"Would you advise [a girl in a cross-generational relationship for financial gain] to continue with this relationship? Yes/no? Why?"

Topic 4: Pregnancy and Education

1,245 participants

53.5% MALE



46.5% FEMALE

Radio audiences were asked:

"In your opinion, should [a pregnant girl's] parents support/allow her to go back to school? Yes or no? Why?"

KEY INSIGHTS

1. Communities mostly attribute HIV vulnerability to behavioural factors

- Four key factors that contribute to HIV vulnerability were cited: behavioural (risky sexual behaviour), biological (differences between girls and boys), social (interpersonal environment) and structural (contextual environment)
- Of these factors, behavioural factors were the most frequently mentioned across both radio stations, as contributing to increased vulnerability of adolescent girls and young women to HIV infection.

“This issue of girls being more vulnerable to infections than boys is because girls are love money and high lifestyles i.e. good phones, good clothing, posh living and sponsors.” - Male, 32 years, Kiambu

“What I can say is that two girls could be sharing one man who is infected.” - Female, 17 years, Machakos

“Girls nowadays prefer not to use condoms.” - Male, 20 years, Homa Bay

RECOMMENDATION

Within this category, lifestyle, sex and money was the most dominant theme, which in this case referred to girls getting involved in cross-generational relationships to be able to get money, and for some to be able to live a good lifestyle. This suggests a need to incorporate this as a topic of discussion among the girls who are currently enrolled at the Bridge Centres, as well as with the wider community during community forums. This insight also underlines the key role that is played by men in the issue of reducing vulnerability of girls and young women, and therefore the need to target men in the community who may be partners of the girls in these cross-generational relationships with behaviour change communication.

2. Stigma around HIV is anticipated based on individuals' trustworthiness.

- Decisions to disclose one's HIV status in school is driven by a cost/benefit analysis of possible positive and negative consequences (emotional, social or physical)
- Importantly, the decision is also largely driven by the person one is disclosing to (in this case, teachers). Participants expressed concern about whether teachers could be trusted with the information, and whether or not they would misuse the information and thereby harm the student.

“She should be frank and tell her teachers so that she can get advice and consolation.” - Male, 20 years, Migori

“No, I was in the same situation I decided to tell my teacher and guess what; when I told him he told almost everyone in my school and due to shame I had to transfer from that school I was in form one and since I joined my new school two years now nobody knows about it and am not ready to tell anyone till am done with school.” - Female, Nairobi

RECOMMENDATION

The main issue was the issue of whether the teacher can be trusted or not. Those for disclosure specified that she should only disclose to a teacher who is trustworthy, while those against felt that teachers cannot be trusted. This indicates a need for sensitisation and capacity building of teachers to be able to handle such cases.

3. Attitudes vary concerning cross-generational relationships

- In response to the question on whether they would advise a teenage girl to continue with a relationship with an older man, there was a marked difference in the proportion of those who answered 'no' among participants of the two radio stations - 88.8% versus 50.5%
- This may be driven by the demographic differences between the participants of the two stations, whereby participants of Radio Ramogi were more likely to be male, more likely to be in a rural area, and also more likely to be older, when compared to Ghetto Radio participants. 'For financial gain' was the most dominant theme supporting the relationship among Ghetto Radio participants who answered 'yes'.

RECOMMENDATION

Given division in the community, it is important to sensitise adolescent girls at the bridge centers, as well as community members during community forums on the potential dangers to adolescent girls of these relationships, especially on their vulnerability to infection.

4. Support for pregnant girls to return to school is conditional.

- The audience were presented with a scenario of a girl who got pregnant and had taken a break to give birth and nurse the baby, and were asked the question: “In your opinion, should her parents support/allow her to go back to school? Yes or no? Why?”. The majority of the participants felt that she should be allowed to go back to school, across both stations. The most dominant theme however among those supporting her education, was ‘under certain conditions’
- Conditions included whether she has nursed the baby, whether she has changed her lifestyle, if she is committed to education, if she receives counselling, if she receives the necessary support from friends and family, or if she is still young.



“She should be allowed to go back to school after the baby has turned 6 months or 10 months.” Male, 21 years, Siaya

“She needs to go back to school but parents to be more careful because she may sleep with another man.” Male, 24 years, Nairobi



RECOMMENDATION

Even though there is a positive intention for her to go back to school, there are some beliefs that may prevent her from going back to school. Some of these beliefs are within the girl's control, and some are out of her control. These results suggest that interventions designed to encourage girls to go back to school and complete their education after pregnancy should take into account the surrounding circumstances that could potentially be facilitators or barriers.