Girl empower – a gender transformative mentoring and cash transfer intervention to promote adolescent well-being

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High levels of exclusion and structural violence against girls

North Central (Nimba & Bong Counties), Liberia (DHS 2007)

- Does not reside with a parent (10-14-yr-olds)
- Not enrolled (10-14-yr-olds)
- Ever had sex (15-19-yr-olds)
- Been pregnant or had child (15-19-yr-olds)
- Currently married or in union (15-19-yr-olds)

DHS outcomes (females, pre-study)
Key pre-program indicators by age => decision to focus on females aged 13-14

Liberia 2007 DHS

- Enrolled
- Ever Sex
- Had Child
At project inception

• Few girl group mentoring programs had examined sexual violence as an outcome

• No girl group mentoring programs had compared outcomes with/without a cash transfer arm
What are the research questions?

• Can a community-based group mentoring program for rural young adolescent girls
  – Safeguard them from sexual violence?
  – Help them remain in school?
  – Lead to safer sexual experiences?

• Does adding a cash transfer to a girl group mentoring program make a difference?
Sexual violence shrinks girls’ worlds at puberty

Spatial access by sex and age in one community (South Africa)

Can skills and social support through girl group mentoring be protective for girls?
Figure 1: Theory of Change for Empowerment Programming for Adolescent Girls

Program Components
- Mentor-led ‘safe space’ group
- Content on gender, power, economic empowerment
- Links to services, community engagement

Delivery Approaches
- Intentional design
- Learner-centered meetings in segments
- Mentor support

Outputs
- Assets
  - Social
  - Health
  - Cognitive
  - Economic
  - Civic & Political

Impact
- Health
- Education
- Livelihoods
- Safety
- Harmful Practices
- Community Norms

Gender Equity

https://ssir.org/articles/entry/how_to_give_adolescent_girls_voice_choice_and_control
Project location: Nimba County
GE intervention components

- Weekly mentored meetings for rural girls aged 13-14 in safe spaces for 11 months
- Monthly facilitated meetings with caregivers for 8 months
- Cashbox and starter savings for every girl ($2/mo x 9 mo = $18.00)
- Monthly cash to caregivers based on girl’s weekly attendance ($1.25/session x 32 sessions = $40.00)
Girl Empower Session Themes

32 weekly girl sessions
- Module 1 – Me and the Girl Empower Group
- Module 2 – Friends/Family/Support Network
- Module 3 – Communication/Goals
- Module 4 – My Body/Health
- Module 5 – Safety/Well-Being
- Module 6 – Money/Financial Plan
- Module 7 – My Girl Empower Community Event

8 parent sessions
- “Protection through Positive Parenting and Caretaking”
GE study design

- 84 villages randomly assigned to one of 3 study arms (28 villages per arm)
  - Control, GE, and GE+cash

- Village-level saturation recruiting for intervention
  - Villages of size 500 to 2000
  - All 13-14 girls in village
Study methods

- Household listing (10 minutes)
- Guardian permission
- Girl assent
- Longitudinal girl survey (45 minutes)
  - Girl designates caregiver
- Caregiver consent
- Longitudinal survey to girl-designated caregiver (15 minutes)

- Verbal face-to-face interviews on tablet
- VACS style questions on sexual violence
What we found at baseline

Ever experienced sexual abuse, 13-14-year-old females (% , n=1216)

- Sexually touched: 29%
- Unsuccessful attempted sex: 25%
- Non-physically pressured: 8%
- Physically forced: 8%
- "Yes" to any type: 37%


## Girl Empower Liberia baseline versus VACS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Any sexual abuse sex in past 12 months</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Girl Empower Liberia (13-14-year-olds)</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swaziland VACS (13-17-year-olds)</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tanzania VACS (13-17-year-olds)</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kenya VACS (13-17-year-olds)</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zimbabwe VACS (13-17-year-olds)</td>
<td>9%</td>
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Girls’ attendance

- 771 surveyed girls registered for the GE groups
  – 46 from baseline not found at program start;
  – 0 refused to join
- 94.5% of girls attended between 24 to 32 GE weekly sessions
- 5.4% of girls attended between 1 to 23 GE weekly sessions
- 771 girls attended 22,901 total weekly sessions
Caregiver attendance

- 771 caregivers trained in collaborative decision making and positive problem resolution
- 771 caregivers attended 5,817 sessions (mean of 7.5 out of 8 possible)
Cash distribution: Savings for all GE & GE+ girls’ Conditional to GE+ parents

- No mobile money
  - Financial services subcontractor hired to administer payments
- Not all parents showed up to get cash in a timely manner
- Some GE caregivers unhappy they were not eligible for cash
- Some GE+ caregivers upset girl did not chose them as designated caregiver for sessions/cash
  - Early community consultations by IRC helped reduce the latter two problems
Program impacts

– Follow-up rate: girls, 97%, caregivers, 96%

– Sizable and statistically significant impact on Sexual Experience/Marriage Index (and most components)
  • GE: β, 0.244 SD, p<0.01; GE+: β, 0.372 SD, p<0.01; F-test for GE=GE+: p=0.075
  • Sexual abstinence, number of sexual partners, condom use, pregnancy, child marriage

– Small and not statistically significant impacts on Sexual Violence and Schooling Indices
Intent to treat: Average treatment effects

Sexual experience, marriage

Number of Partners

Never had Sex

Never Pregnant

Never Married

Safe Sex

Note: Standard deviation treatment effect size and 95% confidence intervals.
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Intent to treat: Average treatment effects

Gender Norms

Life Skills

Note: Standard deviation treatment effect size and 95% confidence intervals.
What worked & what did not?

– Cash transfers to caregivers tied to girls’ program attendance enhanced the impact of Girl Empower on delaying child marriage and increasing the safety of girls’ sexual encounters
  • Not via increased program attendance
  • Nor through girls staying in school
  • Perhaps through a pure income effect
What worked & what did not?

– No impact of GE or GE+ on girls’ school attendance or grade advancement between rounds

– No impact of GE or GE+ on girls’ experience of sexual violence

• Perhaps because protective factors – girls’ social networks, caregiver gender attitudes, caregiver aspirations for their girls – were not impacted
Conclusion/Implications

• Girl Empower itself had important impacts
• Cash increased the child marriage prevention and safer sexual experience effects by ~50%
• The GE program & cash impacts persisted one year after the intervention ended
• Could the life-skills (financial skills, HIV & condom knowledge) and attitudinal changes that the girls gained help them avoid SV later on?