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Yes

The Sisters of Success Mentoring and Girls' Groups in Liberia

Abstract

As girls pass through adolescence, a number of factors influence whether they complete secondary school, avoid teenage pregnancy, and develop the life skills, attitudes, behaviors and relationships that will set them on a path to a healthy and productive adulthood. This evaluation investigates whether being part of a mentorship and life skills program, “Sisters of Success,” during early adolescence improves outcomes for girls in Liberia’s capital city, Monrovia.

Policy Issue

Adolescent fertility rates in Sub-Saharan Africa are substantially higher than other regions of the world, with 115 births per 1,000, compared to 72 births per 1,000 in Latin America and just 19 births per 1,000 in Europe.¹ The gender gap in education is also significant, with West and Central Africa having the largest gender gap in education of all regions in the world.² Increasing the number of girls who complete secondary school, and reducing early motherhood, are common policy goals across many countries in Sub-Saharan Africa. This evaluation will contribute evidence to policymakers on effective programming to reduce

school drop-out and teen pregnancy. Secondly, Liberian policymakers, and NGOs working with Liberia, have noted that life skills are fundamental to individuals' labor market success, but there is little evidence on the impact of life skills training, or the impact of enhanced life skills on real world outcomes. One factor behind this evidence gap is that life skills training is typically delivered together with vocational training, credit, or even cash transfers, thus making it impossible to isolate the impact of the life skills training itself. This evaluation will help fill this evidence gap.

Context of the Evaluation

In Liberia, the adolescent fertility rate is 117 births per 1,000 girls, ages 15-19.³ Meanwhile, within Liberia, the gender gap in school attendance is high. Only 60 percent of girls complete primary school in Liberia, compared to 71 percent of boys, and 19 percent of men have completed secondary school or higher, but only 8 percent of women have accomplished the same.⁴

The Sisters of Success (SOS) program is taking place in an urban area of 1.1 million people. The SOS program's goals are for girls to adopt healthy behaviors, build confidence and self-esteem; learn and practice their rights; begin to develop savings and financial literacy habits; increase their community participation and involvement; and help them work towards their own personal development goals, among others. SOS is coordinated by the International Rescue Committee (IRC), in partnership with two local organizations, EDUCARE, the Planned Parenthood Association of Liberia (PPAL), and volunteer mentors, drawn from the same communities as the girls they mentor.

Details of the Intervention

Sisters of Success will recruit and match girls ages 12-15 with mentors. Each mentor will be randomly matched with ten mentees. Approximately 2,880 girls will participate in the randomized evaluation, with half becoming mentees and half serving as a comparison group.

SOS mentors and mentees meet in "sisterhood sessions," comprised of two mentors and 20 mentees, which meet twice a month over the course of 15 months. The program also includes extracurricular activities in which larger groups of mentors and mentees do activities together. SOS mentors, who are unpaid, are intended to serve as trusted individuals, friends, advisors, coaches, guides, teachers, and role models for the mentees.

Researchers will collect data on a wide range of topics, such as who and what influences girls to leave school; the social and economic factors that influence when girls first have sex and birth their first child, the number and type of partners girls choose, and their use of contraception. The study will also measure the impact of the SOS program on girls labor market activities and earnings. In addition, researchers will evaluate the relative cost-effectiveness of the SOS program as compared to other policy options. Finally, if the program is effective, this study will pinpoint the key mechanisms that make an impact on girls' outcomes.

Results and Policy Lessons

Results forthcoming.

Sources

1. Population Reference Bureau. "Trends in Adolescent Fertility A Mixed Picture." <http://www.prb.org/Publications/Articles/2013/adolescent-fertility.aspx>
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3. World Bank. Adolescent Fertility Rate. Available at: <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.ADO.TFRT>
4. UN Development Group. "Fact Sheet: Empowering Women in Liberia." Available at: <http://www.undg.org/docs/11143/genderemail.pdf>

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