

ABSTRACT

Track: 405 – Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment in SRH

Title: Changing Gender Equitable Beliefs among Urban Dwelling Girls in Lagos and Kano through SRH Programming

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Project Description and Objectives

Nigeria is still faced with some level of developmental challenges that affect efforts to improve positive social norms and gender inequalities that promote healthy behaviours, especially among adolescent girls in disadvantaged communities. The Youth Powered Ecosystem to Advance Urban Adolescent Health (YPE4AH) project is a USAID-funded project designed to empower and inspire young Nigerians to access life skills, social capital, and resources needed to plan and realise their futures. The primary goal is to improve the health and well-being of urban, out-of-school, adolescents aged 15–19 with a high priority on girls, by increasing voluntary family planning (FP) uptake and continued use from a holistic, human capital perspective.

Methodology

The project utilises a unique play-based programme, adapted from evidence-based curricula that are delivered via 12 sessions (SKILLZ United) and 3 supplemental (SKILLZ Club) sessions that last for 60 minutes each. The SKILLZ United curriculum includes critical information on healthy relationships, consent, gender equality, substance abuse, puberty, and contraceptive methods that are used to drive conversations on health, education, and gender while the SKILLZ Club includes information around financial literacy. These curricula are facilitated by relatable near-peer mentors known as Youth Coaches, and female Youth Coaches engage adolescent girls on sensitive topics pertaining to them. These Youth Coaches recruited adolescents from surrounding communities within their respective Local Government Areas and each pair was expected to reach 28 adolescents per intervention group. Coaching pairs scheduled interventions to take place at times convenient for the adolescents. As a part of this curriculum, adolescents take pre and post-tests at the beginning and at the end of the practices that span 6 days. We analysed routine pre and post-tests from January 2023 to December 2023 among all adolescent girls living in urban slums across Lagos and Kano.

Results

Within the 12 months of 2023, 15,628 out-of-school adolescents were mobilised and enrolled into the locally adapted SKILLZ United Curriculum from which 15,564 graduated, with 15,496 enrolled in follow-up SKILLZ Club. Among these, a total of 11,536 took both pre/post assessments. Analysis of the assessments revealed that 48% to 91% increased knowledge of at least three methods to avoid unplanned pregnancy and a further 58% to 91% increased confidence in making choices to protect themselves from pregnancy and STIs if they had sex. 33% to 85% on health issues related to knowing places where they can seek support for their changing bodies and where to seek support for intimate partner violence. 21.0% to 47.9% agreed with all gender-related practices requested. 72% of them increased agreement with gender equitable beliefs on three standard USAID gender question scales. Findings also revealed the project is making more impact among adolescents in Kano, a state with more conservative views on gender equality. Girls there increased markedly in health-seeking (8.2%-78.3%), and gender practices (5.0%-29.9%), and 83.2% of them increased agreement with gender beliefs compared to their counterparts in Lagos (61.8%).

Conclusion

By using female Youth Coaches to facilitate the participatory and play-based learning approach, play-based programmes can reach, penetrate, and empower young girls with lifestyle re-orientation, life skills, and lessons that are responsible for an attributable shift in social norms to promote gender equity and equality, even in conservative settings.