

Schools as a Workplace: Responding to the HIV/AIDS Needs of Teachers in Kenya

Introduction

Teachers are key to the dream of many countries to develop their human capital and to raise the standard of living for their citizens. A nation with an educated and entrepreneurial workforce can attract the right investments and provide the talent pool necessary for today's global competitiveness. However, HIV/AIDS may impede, and reverse these ambitions. It erodes the available pool of qualified teachers while the demand for education rises as schools become a buffer for fragmenting and disintegrating families.

Data on the actual disease burden in the teaching workforce for most countries is unavailable, but a South African study suggests that teachers have a similar HIV prevalence as the general population (Shisana et al, 2005). Applying Kenya's current HIV prevalence of 5.1% from the National Aids Control Council to the country's 250,000 teachers, then nearly 13,000 teachers are living with HIV. And while they form the single largest block of workers in the country, few programs are directed at them as individuals who are also infected and affected by HIV. This may be largely because schools are seen from the perspective of learners, and not often from the perspective of the employees.

This paper highlights some of the programmatic issues that need to be considered in developing a teacher-centered HIV workplace program. It is based on a recently-completed operations research initiative testing a risk-reduction model developed for schools as a workplace in Kenya – the Teachers Matter program.

Key Lessons from the Study's Findings

Teachers are willing learners and collaborators

Almost all (92%) of the respondents in the intervention schools had heard of Teachers Matter at the follow up survey. Of those, 90% participated in the project's activities. Ninety percent of those who participated took further action related to HIV, such as remaining monogamous (72%), talking with family members or friends about HIV (68%), getting tested for HIV (32%), abstaining (32%), or using condoms (18%) as a result of the project. Nearly all (96%) recommended that the program be continued.

Support from school management & Ministry of Education is key in overcoming challenges

In general, teachers were keen to discuss how HIV was affecting them. Peer educators demonstrated innovation and resourcefulness in their ability to reach their fellow teachers. However, there were a few challenges at the beginning: a few teachers were skeptical that they would learn anything new; some teachers expected financial compensation for attending the meetings; many teachers were still uncomfortable discussing sexual matters, especially topics like condoms; due to the heterogeneity of the teaching staff, it was sometimes difficult for a peer

educator to relate to all the teachers, and this made discussions of some sensitive topics awkward; teachers, and even peer educators, were reluctant to participate actively, lest they draw undue attention to themselves and raise questions about their own HIV status. Supportive monitoring and support from head teachers often addressed these issues successfully. Endorsement from the district education offices greatly facilitated acceptance of the project.

Interventions promote a sense of cohesion and group self-efficacy with regards to the collective ability to cope with HIV/AIDS issues

Respondents in schools where Teachers Matter was implemented reported significantly greater progress in how adept the school's management had become at coping with HIV/AIDS issues compared to a year earlier. Regression analysis showed that compared to those who were not exposed to Teachers Matter, respondents who attended some of the meetings were 1.6 times more likely to report "great improvement" in the school management's HIV coping ability (CI: 1.2 – 2.2), while those who attended all the meetings were 2.7 times as likely (CI: 1.9 – 4.0).

Teacher-centered interventions are useful in spreading vital information

HIV/AIDS is now a common topic in Kenya, widely covered in the media and regularly discussed in churches, homes, schools, and community meetings. For example, teachers who attended some of the meetings were 4.7 times more likely to have read the Education Sector Policy on HIV compared to those who did not attend, and those who attended all 13.7 times more likely. Those who attended some sessions were 5.9 times more likely to know what PEP was, while those who attended all the meetings were 15.5 times more likely to know, compared to their counterparts who did not attend any meetings (CI: 9.6–24.9). In addition, those who attended some meetings were 3.8 times more likely to have seen a female condom (CI: 2.7–5.4), while those who attended all meetings were 5.2 times as likely (CI: 3.2–8.6). These topics are not part of general communication, and thus Teachers Matter was an effective way to transmit information that is not part of public discourse.

A significant number of teachers are affected by HIV/AIDS

Teachers continue to be strongly affected by HIV/AIDS in their personal lives, as many of their relatives have been either infected with HIV or have died of AIDS. Indeed, nearly 40% of teachers in the intervention and comparison schools at follow-up were aware of an "immediate family member" who had died of AIDS.

HIV-related confidentiality at work is a matter of concern

Analysis shows that much ambiguity remains regarding job security of HIV positive and recourse for breaches of confidentiality. At follow up, over half of the teachers in both

ways of providing teachers with clear information in this area.

Many teachers fear being infected at work

Baseline data showed that teachers feared being infected at work, since they may be exposed to HIV when dealing with school-related injuries during sports, laboratory sessions, among others. In addition, the fact that primary school education is now free in Kenya means that many children whose parents could not afford school, including some HIV-infected children, have now enrolled. In response, Teachers Matter educated teachers on HIV transmission, in an effort to allay their fears. After the project, the percent of teachers who were “very concerned” about becoming infected with HIV at work declined from 65% to 57% in the intervention schools ($p < .017$), but there was no change in the comparison schools (61 percent both rounds, $p = 0.726$). However, it is worth noting that even after the intervention, 57% of teachers still consider their HIV risk at work high, indicating a need to further address this problem.

The program increased awareness and created positive attitudes toward condom use

After participating in the intervention, teachers demonstrated a statistically significant increase in positive attitudes toward male condoms from 49 to 64% ($p < .0001$), compared to no significant change in the comparison group (52 to 58%, $p = 0.071$). Teachers Matter also effectively conveyed information about female condoms, as there was a significant increase in those who had seen a female condom, from 42 to 77% in the intervention group ($p < .0001$), compared to a smaller increase in the comparison group, from 47 to 55% ($p < .01$).

To increase HIV testing among teachers, more intensive programmatic efforts are needed

While there was an increase in the number of teachers who were tested following the program, many still remain fearful and only 43% of untested teachers in both the intervention and comparison groups wanted to be tested. About 40% of teachers in both intervention and comparison schools were tested, suggesting that the remaining 60% have not. The program did not impact on the likelihood of partners getting tested, suggesting that activities more specifically directed at partners and couples would be needed for this change to occur.

Majority of teachers involved in multiple sexual partnerships do not protect themselves against HIV

The majority of teachers are open on sexual risk-taking but the bulk of those involved in multiple partnerships do not protect themselves against HIV. Although questions about detailed sexual risk-taking elicited a non-response rate of about 15%, available data showed that at follow up, 14% of

respondents in the intervention schools had multiple partners in the 12 months preceding the research. However, 90% of such teachers said they did not use condoms “always” during these encounters.

Many stakeholders have important roles to play in the school workplace

The school workplace is governed by many actors including the school management, the local and national education authorities, interest groups, teachers’ unions, parents and the private sector, to mention a few. Strategies that can involve these stakeholders are more likely to be successful than those that go it alone. Teachers Matter involved the government ministries, the teachers’ employers, unions, and others as members of the advisory committee. The project worked with interest groups such as Kenya Network of Positive Teachers, and worked with the private sector such as the banking industry. By harnessing the competitive advantage of each entity, Teachers Matter got more mileage and presented a more relevant package for the teachers.

Conclusions

Because four in ten teachers have personally experienced a death from HIV in their immediate family, programs to help teachers cope in their individual lives are as important as activities to help them educate their students. Such programs can be informed with the lessons learnt from the Teachers Matter program. Overall, the support and endorsement of such programs by the Ministry of Education and school management are very critical to their success.

The Teachers Matter Program

The *Teachers Matter* workplace intervention was implemented in 180 schools in four districts in Kenya. The research was based on a quasi-experimental design, and collectively the project reached over 2700 teachers.

Project implementation began in 2006 and lasted about nine months (one academic year). It was a peer-led education program, guided by a 10-unit interactive manual. The intervention drew on two behavioral theories: the Theory of Gender and Power and the Transtheoretical Model. Prior to program implementation, a peer educator from each participating school was identified and received a one-week training. During the training, peer educators developed a weekly work plan, which they followed upon return to their duty stations. Peer education sessions were held weekly, and each session lasted an hour. Schools took around 36 weeks to complete the manual. Peer educators were supported by quarterly visits from the *Teachers Matter* study monitor, who helped with trouble-shooting and re-supply of materials. Teachers also benefited from the support of Kenya Network of Postive Teachers, a network of teachers living with HIV. Schools were provided with support materials such as tailor-made brochures and calendars, as well as other educational materials (e.g. penis model, samples of both male and female condoms, samples of ARVs, videos and posters). Because *Teachers Matter* was commencing activities just as the Ministry of Education was starting distribution of its Education Sector Workplace Policy on HIV and AIDS, copies of the policy were included in the project as well.

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For details and references, please read the full paper: “Schools as a Workplace: Responding to HIV/AIDS needs of Teachers in Kenya” by Karusa Kiragu (kkiragu@pcnairobi.org) and Caroline Mackenzie (cmackenzie@pcnairobi.org). This paper is available from APHRC and Population Council (www.popucouncil.org). This brief was written by Chimaraoke Izugbara.