

Researchers

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Timeline

2010-2012

Sample Size

1,500 clients from 300 microfinance groups

Research Implemented by IPA

Yes

The Impact of Health Insurance Education on Enrollment in Ghana's National Health Insurance Scheme

Abstract

Government-subsidized health care is seen as a useful tool in tackling the health challenges in sub-Saharan Africa, but for it to work, people have to enroll in the program. Ghana offers universal health care, but only about a third of the population is enrolled. Some evidence suggested education about the insurance program would boost enrollment. However, a randomized evaluation in northern Ghana determined that education was not the barrier.

Policy Issue

Health outcomes in sub-Saharan Africa are on average very poor. While the region has 11 percent of the world's population, it accounts for half of the deaths of children under five, has the highest maternal mortality rate and is disproportionately impacted by HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, and malaria.^[1] Many people, especially in rural areas, lack access to basic health care services. To help tackle the problem, some governments are providing low-cost public insurance options. However, getting the population enrolled in such programs has been a challenge in some countries. One theory was that low enrollment was a result of lack of knowledge and understanding of health insurance, and that health insurance education

would lead to higher enrollment rates.

Context of the Evaluation

Although Ghana's National Health Insurance Scheme has offered low-cost insurance since 2003, a large share of the population remains uncovered. As of 2010, the National Health Insurance Authority estimated that only 34 percent of the population was actively enrolled in health insurance. Coverage rates are especially low in rural areas, including Ghana's Northern Region.

Preliminary qualitative research from international development organization Freedom From Hunger suggested that one reason for low enrollment was lack of knowledge and understanding of health insurance. Freedom From Hunger and IPA partnered to evaluate the impact of an education program developed by Freedom From Hunger on enrollment rates. Freedom From Hunger and IPA then partnered with a local microfinance institution Sinapi Aba Trust to administer the health insurance education program to Sinapi Aba Trust's clients in both urban and rural areas in the Northern Region, Ghana, specifically in Bole, Salaga, Tamale, and Walewale.

Details of the Intervention

To understand if health insurance education leads to higher enrollment rates, researchers carried out a randomized evaluation with survey data from 1,500 Sinapi Aba Trust microfinance group clients. Credit officers with Sinapi Aba Trust administered the education program to microfinance groups after being trained by Freedom From Hunger.

Three hundred microfinance groups were randomly selected from among Sinapi Aba Trust's client groups. The groups were stratified by branch, depending on whether the group was urban or rural, and whether initial insurance enrollment for the group was estimated to be high or low. Of those 300 groups, 120 were randomly assigned to the comparison group, while 45 were assigned to each of four treatment groups. All of the treatment groups received education covering planning for health expenses, the definition of health insurance and its benefits, and how to sign up for Ghana's National Health Insurance Scheme.

The four treatment groups were as follows:

Short session education: These credit groups received education through a series of six 30-minute sessions over 12 weeks.

Short session education and reminder session: These credit groups were also given education through a series of six 30-minute sessions over 12 weeks, but with a session one year later that reviewed the material and reminded clients that to continue to have access to health insurance, they needed to enroll each year.

Consolidated session education: These credit groups covered the same material as the “short session” groups but in one 2-hour session.

Consolidated session education and reminder session: These credit groups covered the same material as the “short session” groups but in one 2-hour session, and with a reminder session one year later.

A fifth, comparison group did not receive any education program.

IPA conducted baseline, midline, and endline surveys with 1,500 respondents. Within each client group, five individuals were randomly selected to be included in the study data. Sinapi Aba Trust credit officers administered post-education knowledge tests with a small subset of the sample. IPA also conducted a qualitative endline survey with a small a subset of the sample.

Results and Policy Lessons

Results indicated that individuals who received health insurance education were no more likely to enroll in health insurance than individuals in the control group.^[2]

While education may have had some impact on knowledge of insurance, the effect was short-lived. Notably, attitudes towards insurance were universally favorable, and knowledge of insurance generally high, regardless of treatment status. This suggests that knowledge was not a major barrier to health insurance enrollment in Ghana. Follow-up interviews suggest that the convenience of registration, clients following through on stated intent to enroll, and the timing of making the premium payments are more common challenges for enrollment. In environments where knowledge and enrollment are low, educational programs may, therefore, have more impact.

Enrollment increased for all of the studied groups, including the comparison group that received no treatment, at a higher rate than the general population. It is possible that the repeated surveys, along with the treatment activities, might have served as “touch points” that prompted clients to take action to register or enroll in insurance.

In sum, this study joins a growing body of evidence finding that in many contexts, the impact of education programs on health insurance enrollment is limited, especially where a program is established and generally well-known. This research suggests that efforts to promote enrollment should focus on other barriers to enrollment, such as convenience, timing of costs, and following through with intent to enroll.

Sources

[1]International Finance Corporation, “Health and Education in Africa.”

[2]Schultz, Elizabeth, Metcalfe, Marcia, and Gray, Bobbi. “The Impact of Health Insurance Education on Enrollment of Microfinance Institution Clients in the Ghana National Health Insurance Scheme, Northern Ghana.” Microinsurance Innovation Facility, ILO. No. 33, May 2013.

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