



Sisters of Success: Measuring the impact of mentoring and girls groups in supporting girls' transition into adolescence and adulthood, in Liberia

BASELINE SURVEY REPORT EXECUTIVE SUMMARYⁱ

Background

The Sisters of Success (SOS) program supports girls' transition into adolescence and adulthood. The SOS program's primary goals are to reduce in-school girls' likelihood of dropping out of school; to increase out-of-school girls' likelihood of returning to school; and to reduce girls' risky sexual behavior and likelihood of becoming pregnant as a minor. More broadly, the SOS program aims to help girls 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 work towards their own personal development goals.

The SOS program was implemented in Monrovia, Liberia, by IRC and two local organizations – EDUCARE and Planned Parenthood Association of Liberia (PPAL) – during 2014 and 2015. The program matched girls to mentors – approximately ten girls per mentor, and involved “Sisterhood Meetings” of two mentors and their respective mentees, twice a month over the course of 15 months, as well as some larger group extracurricular activities. Mentors are women from the community that are 18 or older, secondary school graduates, who volunteered to become mentors.

A randomized controlled trial impact evaluation of the SOS program is being run by the World Bank's Africa Region Gender Innovation Lab, IRC, and Innovations for Poverty Action. The SOS program and impact evaluation build upon the World Bank's existing portfolio on adolescent girls in Liberia, specifically the Government of Liberia's Economic Empowerment of Adolescent Girls and Young Women (EPAG) project. In contrast with EPAG, SOS targets younger girls.

This note summarizes the findings from the baseline survey for this impact evaluation, which was conducted between October 2013 and January 2014. The baseline survey was conducted with girls interested in SOS, aged 12-15, who resided in the target communitiesⁱⁱⁱ, and whose guardians consented to the girl's participation in SOS and the survey. In total, baseline data was collected from 2,884 girls and one guardian for each girl. These 2,884 girls form the “study sample.” Half of these girls were then randomly selected to participate in the SOS program and became the “treatment group”, and the other half were kept as the “control group”. The extent to which our study results can reasonably represent the results one would expect for other girls in Greater Monrovia depends on how similar girls and households in the study sample are to a representative sample of Greater Monrovia. Analysis suggests that they are in fact quite similar.

A full length report on findings from the baseline survey is also available.

Baseline Survey Results

Demographics

In the study sample, 13% of girls live without any financial support from biological parents; 28% live apart from both biological parents; and 39% of girls live with both biological parents. 95% of girls live with a relative (parents or other). The median household has seven people, four of whom are aged 17 or below. The median household is supported by two adults; has a median annual income of 1,500 US dollars; spends 8% of its income on expenses associated with the girls' schooling (126 US dollars per year)ⁱⁱ, and 32% of household income on schooling for all members aged 17 or below.

Schooling

In the study sample, school enrollment is very high: 95% of study sample girls are enrolled in school. Girls started school on time (between 6 and 7 years old), but we think they started kindergarten at this time, rather than year 1 of primary – thus by the time they started year 1 of primary, they were already behind, or “over-age”. Of the girls in this study, 93% of girls are over-age for their grade level, and the median girl is over-age by four years^{iv}. Median levels of schooling in our sample is 2 years of primary for 12 year olds, 3 years for 13 year olds; 4 years for 14 year olds; and 5 years of primary for 15 year olds.

Lack of money for school fees is the main reason why girls have dropped out in the past (73% of those who dropped out), missed school at some point (34% of all girls), and the main reason they think they might drop out in the future (50% of all girls). 75% of girls named a parent as the person who puts the most towards their education, and 23% cited another family member. Also notable is that even those girls who work are not working very many hours, and are not contributing significantly to household income.

Universally, study sample girls (and their guardians) have high educational aspirations which exceed educational achievements in the household^v. And girls’ households are generally supportive of schooling: Amongst all people aged 17 or less in girls’ households, 82% are currently enrolled in school, and 11% are not enrolled but planning to start again. 97% of girls reported that somebody attends parent meetings at school on their behalf, and 53% of girls said that somebody in their household helps them with school work. Furthermore, girls and guardians views are very gender egalitarian regarding schooling for girls and boys. And girls and guardians correctly believe that more schooling translates to higher wages.

SEXUALITY

Few of the study sample girls have ever had a boyfriend (10%) or had sex (8%)^{vi}. However, there are substantial increases in the percent of girls that had ever had sex over this four-year age range^{vii}. Among girls who had ever had sex, 15% received gifts, and 11% report that finances played a role in them continuing this relationship. Most girls anticipate their 20s to be the time when they would have their first boyfriend; to live with a man; and to have their first child.

Footnotes

i For more information on this project, contact Tricia Koroknay-Palicz, at tgonwa@worldbank.org.

ii These included 16 urban and 2 peri-urban communities, all within the greater Monrovia area. Specifically: Bassa Community; Battery Factory; Bentol; Brewerville; Chicken Soup Factory; Clara Town; Congo Town (Peace Island); Doe Community (Freeport); Duport Road (Voka Mission, and Zubah Town); LoganTown; Morris Farm; New Kru Town; Old Road (Gaye Town); Pipeline; Redlight (Soul Clinic, and Wood Camp); and West Point.

iii Including tuition, fees, uniforms, books, supplies, transport, and feeding and lodging at school.

iv An “at-age” student is one whose age is the official age for her grade level. Per Liberia’s Ministry of Education, an at-age six year old should be in grade 1, and an at-age twelve year old in grade 7. Causes of a student may be “over-age” may include starting school late; missing or failing to complete years of schooling; or failing to pass a grade. In Montserrado County, 86% of girls in primary and 90% in secondary schools are over-age.

v 95% of girls and guardians would like the girl to complete university whereas only 8% of mothers and 28% of fathers have completed any post-secondary schooling – and only 33% of mothers completed junior secondary or higher. As for actual plans, they are lower: 64% of girls plan to complete university, and 32% senior secondary.

vi Out of 2,884 girls in the study sample: only 1 had ever been married; only 7 had ever cohabitated with a man; only 24 had ever been pregnant; and only 10 had given birth.

vii The percent of girls that have ever had sex is 1% for 12-13 year olds; 7% for 14 year olds; and 26% for 15 year olds.