BUILDING EVIDENCE FOR THE INTEGRATION OF ECONOMIC STRENGTHENING AND HIV PREVENTION EDUCATION FOR VULNERABLE CHILDREN AND YOUTH

Presentation to
Global Perspectives on Adolescent Health and Economic Strengthening Conference
International Center for Child Health and Asset Development
School of Social Work, Columbia University
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OUTLINE OF PRESENTATION

I. Overview of ASPIRES
II. South Africa project
III. Integration & how we measure it
IV. Reflections on building partnerships and engaging funders
THE NAME & THE GOAL

• ASPIRES: Accelerating Strategies for Practical Innovation & Research in Economic Strengthening

• Overarching goal: To improve economic security & health outcomes of highly vulnerable populations.

• Emphasis on:
  o Orphans and vulnerable children & youth
  o OVC households & caregivers
  o HIV-affected households
WHAT WE DO

RESEARCH

Evaluation research examples
• RCT in South Africa
• ES + social intervention for adolescent girls in Mozambique
• ES + family care interventions in Uganda

Formative research example
• Ethnographic research + financial diaries with FSW in Cote d’Ivoire

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

• Integrating ES & HIV prevention education for South African youth
• Vulnerability assessment
• Financial capabilities training pilot for FSW in Cote d’Ivoire
• Training in household ES (HES) for OVC programs

KNOWLEDGE MOBILIZATION

• Technical Guidance Series
• HES Research Dialogues
ASPIRES IN SOUTH AFRICA

- Objective: Equip vulnerable youth with assets & skills to attain good livelihoods & better health outcomes.
- Approach: Build the capacities of implementing partners to deliver youth-focused ES programming, integrated with HIV prevention education.
- Main activities:
  - ES interventions – training of youth in financial capabilities (savings focus), employability skills-building, entrepreneurship, & support for accessing tertiary education (both vocational & university)
  - HIV prevention education – technical overhaul & training on HIV prevention curriculum (Vhutshilo 2)
  - Multi-part research program with full-factorial RCT at center
Study Title: A randomized study evaluating an intervention integrating economic strengthening and HIV prevention programs for vulnerable youth in South Africa

Principal Investigator:
Holly McClain Burke, PhD, MPH
Scientist, Social & Behavioral Health Sciences
FHI 360
RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

To assess whether the integration of an economic strengthening program with an HIV-prevention education program produces synergistic effects on economic & health outcomes.

Do integrated models work?
INTEGRATION THEORY OF CHANGE

HIV prevention education educates, builds skills → safer sex practices & lower rates of STIs, HIV & unintended pregnancies

Economic interventions → reduce economic vulnerability & related risk behaviors

Combination yields greater (synergistic) results
OVERARCHING QUESTIONS

• Do integrated models work?
• Is integration an especially powerful tool in moving towards an AIDS-free generation?
• Is the project worth replicating?
• Study populations:
  o Adolescents (14-17 years-old) who are vulnerable to HIV (up to 2,000) & participate in FF program
  o Caregivers of adolescent participants (up to 36)
  o FF program implementation staff members (up to 12)

• Four communities located in greater Pretoria
STUDY DESIGN

We need “gold standard” level of evidence …

• Full factorial randomized controlled study with qualitative & costing subcomponents

• ~18 months – with baseline, endline, second endline (+6-9 months)

—Adolescents randomized into 4 arms—

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ES + HIV Prevention</th>
<th>HIV Prevention only</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ES intervention only</td>
<td>Control*</td>
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*Adolescents in all arms will receive Future Families’ standard of care. After the study concludes, youth in the two single intervention arms & the control arm will receive the trainings they were not provided.
PARTNERSHIPS

• RCT undertaken with
  o Future Families, a non-profit that provides services to OVC households through local care & social workers
  o ES & HIV Prev Ed TA providers
  o Survey research firm

• Issues
  o Building capacity to manage 1,500 interventions
  o Care/social worker approach v. scientific rigor
  o Interfacing with survey research partner
  o Collecting data immediately useful for programming
RESEARCH FUNDING CHALLENGES

• ES/HIV integration research is limited, making it difficult to demonstrate *ex ante* that research will be likely to provide value for money invested

• Allocating funds between programming to benefit vulnerable populations served by implementing partner and costs of an RCT
  
  - Perceptions around “payoff” horizon or timeline for research v. immediate needs
  - Finding funding to cover unanticipated obstacles in both programming & research
INTERPLAY BETWEEN FUNDING & RESEARCH METHODS

• Communicating and managing the tradeoffs between building basic knowledge v. the acquisition of insights to make programming effective in diverse settings
  o distinct benefits and limits of RCT v. Mixed Methods research designs
  o time horizons
PROMOTING DIALOGUE BETWEEN RESEARCHERS, PRACTITIONERS, POLICYMAKERS, & DONORS

• Gathering and sharing feedback is a challenge when capacities are stretched thin by magnitude and speed of research efforts

• RCT design does not easily lend itself to sharing intermediate/interim findings

• Requires all players to not only commit to learning but to calibrating and articulating organizational learning styles to one another
Thank you!

The ASPIRES Team

For more information, please contact:
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For ASPIRES learning products, please visit:
http://bit.ly/1rwRue3
or