Persistent economic scarcity among low-income adolescents and young adults: implications for improving SRH outcomes

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Background

- Poverty-related factors have all been associated with risky sexual behaviors that increase risk of HIV infection
  - Debt, unemployment, income instability, food insecurity, material deprivation, and lack of or loss of financial support

- These studies have broadened our understanding of economic factors associated with HIV risk

- Current research has been limited by a focus on quantifying relative probabilities of sexual risk behaviors in absence of explanatory narratives by participants
Behavioral Economics of Scarcity:

- How individuals make choices when resources are insufficient or in short supply.

- Scarcity lens has increasingly been applied to the context of HIV and SRH

- More nuanced concept of scarcity integrates psychology and economics
  - Physical effects of poverty
  - Endemic psychological consequences of resource scarcity
Setting: Kenya (HIV/AIDS)

- 2 informal urban settlements in Nairobi
  - Korogocho
  - Kawangware
- Slum youth have higher risk of HIV vs. rural areas or non-slum urban youth.
- HIV prevalence across Nairobi’s urban slums = 8 to 12% (national average = 7%)
- Primarily during adolescence and young adulthood, aged 15-24.
Methods:

- **N=20 FGDs (n=82 youth)**
  - Inclusion criteria: living in one of two slums, aged 15-22
  - Stratified youth across four gender-age strata (i.e. girls/boys, 15-17 years; and women/men, 18 – 22 years)

- Data collection: December 2014 – March 2015

- **Semi-structured FGD discussion guide**
  - Describe the economic situation of youth in this settlement.
  - How has your economic situation influenced your capacity to protect yourself from HIV?
  - How do you think changing your economic status will change the way you or other youth protect themselves from HIV?

- **Kiswahili language, translated to English**

- **Duration: 90 to 120 minutes**
Data Analysis:

- Initial line-by-line inductive coding
- Codes categorized into 4 economic domains based on the types of economic determinants described by youth:
  - (1) **Economic resources**: cash, savings, income, or employment
  - (2) **Economic environments**: references to impoverished settings, local economies, or exchange markets
  - (3) **Economic costs**: mention of expenses, fees, price, or financial gains and losses
  - (4) **Economic motivations**: descriptions of financial goals or pursuits

- Applied 2\textsuperscript{nd} second cycle of focused coding to investigate relationship of HIV risk and scarcity (excess) for each of the economic domains
Thematic Findings by Domain:

(1) Economic resources

- Increases ability to acquire sexual partners
- Increases ability to reduce number of sexual partners
- Minimizes adverse effects of acquiring HIV

(2) Economic environment

- Limited sexually-safe employment options
- Financially-interdependent sexual networks
(3) Economic costs

- Condom prices discourage use
- Financial barriers to HIV testing

(4) Economic motivations

- Economic survival more important than avoiding HIV
- Long-term goals motivate protective sex
- Sex exchange as an investment strategy
“When you have money, you know you get sex. Let’s just be honest. When you have money, that is when you get sex.” – Kawangwere, Male

“With how the economy is down, I cannot have a girl in the house …because I cannot meet all those needs. So when you don’t have money, the day you get something small you go around tasting all over.” – Kawangwere, Male

“Most of people risk because now they will see actually I have money. Even if I got that disease, I can cater for the medical expenses” – Korogocho, Female

“So a man comes and tells her ‘let us go to my house you wash clothes for me,’ so that washing of clothes was for him to do what…? So, there also, the person with no money to protect themselves will be [having it] hard.” – Korogocho, Female

“The ones who are at a high risk of getting HIV are both of them because if we look at the neighborhood, it’s not just the girls who engage in prostitution. All people engage in it. You find that a guy gets a sugar mummy who gives him money, and he feels that that’s the only way out.” – Korogocho, Male
Closing Remarks:

Measurement Implications:

• Scarcity theory draws attention to the role of financial (in)security in altering how individuals approach sexual decision-making.

• Currently developing of an HIV-contextualized economic empowerment scale
  ◦ To reflect behavioral economic domains revealed in youth FGDs
  ◦ To use more diverse economic indicators linked with HIV/SRH behaviors
  ◦ To include gender- and age-tailored relationships
  ◦ To capture changes in perception, decision-making, and behaviors
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