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Can training Zambian girls in negotiation skills positively impact their health and education outcomes?

School data for Zambia shows a **dramatic decline in female enrollment** beginning in the early teen years. While this drop is normally attributed to the commencement of school fees in the eighth grade, a closer look reveals that the enrollment decline starts prior to the fee increase, and is three times higher for girls than boys, according to the Zambian Ministry of Education.

When young girls struggle to stay in school, they may not develop

the skills necessary to support themselves, and in relying on male partners for resources, they oftentimes have to offer sex in return. Such relationships are prevalent across sub-Saharan Africa, leaving young girls **highly vulnerable to HIV infection and unwanted pregnancy**, evidenced by the two-to-one ratio of HIV rates among young women versus their male counterparts.

What if there was a way to train Zambian girls to adopt the communication skills needed to

negotiate health and education decisions with power figures in their lives?

Through a **randomized controlled trial (RCT)**, the gold standard for program evaluations, our study analyzes whether negotiation skills that allow a girl to reshape her own understanding of a conflict and her communications with others, without changing outside factors, can ultimately result in more favorable allocations of resources.

WHY ZAMBIAN GIRLS?

- Zambian women endure **high maternal mortality** (470/100,000), **high HIV rates** (57% of adults living with HIV are women), and **high dropout rates**.^a (see chart at left)
- **Challenging cultural context** for young women and children, in which speaking out to adults is unacceptable, limiting the ability for girls to serve as agents of change.
- **Early teen years are ideal time for an intervention**: 15.9% of women reported first act of sexual intercourse at age 15; 60.4% reported age 18.^a
- Zambian government seeking to **reduce or eliminate school fees in the future**, but this is costly and requires substantial infrastructure adjustments. More cost-effective solutions would allow near-term improvements without massive investment.

^aSource: Zambia DHS 2007

Dropout Rates by Grade, Zambia 2007^a



Negotiating a Better Future

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January 01, 2012