Authors
Pascaline Dupas
Princeton University



Do Teenagers Respond to HIV Risk Information?
Evidence from a Field Experiment in Kenya*

By Pascaline Dupas*

We use a randomized experiment to test whether and what information changes teenagers' sexual behavior in Kenya. Providing information on the relative risk of HIV infection by partner's age led to a 28 percent decrease in teen pregnancy, an objective proxy for the incidence of unprotected sex. Self-reported sexual behavior data suggests substitution away from older (riskier) partners and toward same-age partners. In contrast, the official abstinence-only HIV curriculum had no impact on teen pregnancy. These results suggest that teenagers are responsive to risk information, but their sexual behavior is more elastic on the intensive than on the extensive margin. (JEL D83, I12, J13, O12)

Nearly 2 million people become infected with HIV/AIDS every year in sub-Saharan Africa, the great majority of them through sex, and a quarter of them before the age of 25.[1] AIDS is incurable and no successful HIV vaccine has been developed yet. Thus, ensuring the adoption of safer sexual behavior among youths remains critical to combating the disease.

Now that the great majority of children in Africa acquire at least some primary education, some have argued that primary schools offer a unique opportunity to deliver HIV prevention education to youths before they become sexually active (World Bank 2002). There is, however, considerable debate over whether scalable school-based HIV/AIDS education programs can be effective in limiting the spread of HIV/AIDS among youths, and over what should be the content of these programs. Many sub-Saharan African countries have incorporated HIV/AIDS education in their school curriculum, but the great majority of those curricula are limited to *risk avoidance* information; they aim at completely eliminating

Do Teenagers Respond to HIV Risk Information? Evidence from a Field Experiment in Kenya

We use a randomized experiment to test whether and what information changes teenagers' sexual behavior in Kenya. Providing information on the relative risk of HIV infection by partner's age led to a 28 percent decrease in teen pregnancy, an objective proxy for the incidence of unprotected sex.

January 01, 2011