

COMMUNICATION

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The Adolescent and Reproductive Health Communication Program Logo — “Nijeko Jano” (Know Yourself)



Bangladesh Center for Communication Programs

To learn more contact:

Shana Yansen
Program Officer II
syansen@jhuccp.org
or
Marc Boulay
Senior Program Evaluation Officer
mboulay@jhuccp.org

Health Communication Partnership
based at the Johns Hopkins
Bloomberg School of Public Health/
Center for Communication Programs
111 Market Place Suite 310
Baltimore, Maryland 21202, USA
Tel: (410) 659-6300
Fax: (410) 659-6266
Website: <http://www.jhuccp.org>
E-mail: orders@jhuccp.org

“Know Yourself” Toolkit Helps Reduce Pre-Marital Sex among Young Men in Bangladesh

Indicators for Reproductive Health Knowledge and Norms Also Improve

The “Know Yourself” Intervention

The implementation of the “Know Yourself” Toolkit in Bangladesh has contributed to a reduction in pre-marital sexual behavior among young men and to improvements in adolescents’ reproductive health knowledge and perceived norms of risk behaviors. The Adolescent and Reproductive Health (ARH) Communication Program, unified by the logo “Nijeko Jano” (Know Yourself), developed an interactive multimedia toolkit for NGOs to conduct community-based workshops. The toolkit consists of a series of four educational and entertaining videos, four accompanying facilitator’s guides, question and answer booklets, and reproductive health-related comic books. The workshops focus on the changes and challenges adolescents face during and after puberty.

A total of 3,360 adolescent boys and girls attended these workshops during the one-year intervention. Participants engaged in a series of group exercises and discussions and watched videos to promote their knowledge and life skills related to four thematic areas: “Puberty,” “New Feelings, New Passions,” “Risk of HIV/AIDS & STIs,” and “Preparing for Marriage and Family Life.”

As part of the toolkit implementation, the program also distributed a large number of ARH materials to the adolescent participants and their parents/teachers, including a total of

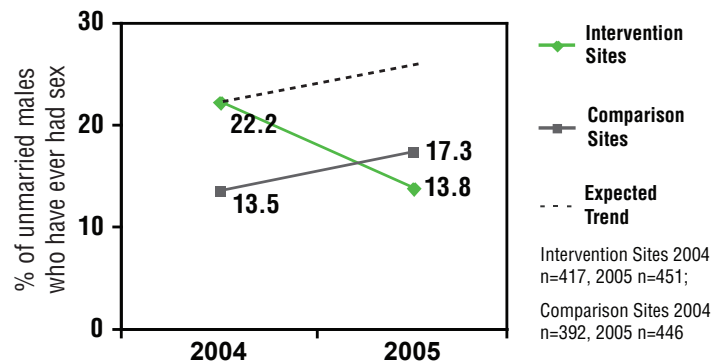
4,500 booklets and over 1,000 comic books on the four thematic areas. Furthermore, local NGOs conducted orientation sessions with parents, community and religious leaders, and other stakeholders. They also established six adolescent-friendly health corners where youth could socialize, learn, and access confidential, professional health services when needed.

Methodology and Analysis

To measure the intervention’s effect on reproductive health-related knowledge, attitudes and behaviors, the ARH Program fielded two cross-sectional surveys—one in March 2004, the other in July 2005. These surveys interviewed a representative sample of adolescents aged 10-19 in three intervention and three comparison areas.

The intervention and comparison samples differed in the initial surveys, possibly reflecting the effects of preliminary project activities or other interventions. To account for these pre-existing differences, the analysis compared the trends in intervention areas to the those in the comparison areas. While it is possible that the initial gaps between the intervention and comparison areas reflected different trends in the two areas, the trends in the comparison areas were used to estimate the expected trends in intervention areas—that is, the changes that would have occurred without the “Know Yourself” program activities. To help illustrate

Figure 1:
Percent of unmarried males who have ever had sex, 2004-2005



the program's influence, the figures below include not only the observed trends, but also the expected trends for the intervention areas. The difference between the two trends can be attributed to the intervention.

RESULTS

Premarital sexual behavior among male adolescents decreased significantly between 2004 and 2005

The percent of unmarried males reporting ever having sex decreased significantly in the intervention areas, dropping from 22 percent in 2004 to 14 percent in 2005 ($p < .05$). In contrast, the proportion of unmarried males in the comparison areas who reported ever having sex did not change significantly over time, with 13.5 percent ever having sex in 2004 and 17 percent ever having sex in 2005.

Adolescents' knowledge of reproductive health increased

A summary index measured respondents' knowledge of a range of reproductive health topics, including adolescence, pregnancy, contraception, maternal health, and HIV/AIDS. While knowledge of reproductive health increased significantly in the comparison areas, there was an even greater increase in knowledge among adolescents in the intervention areas. In Figure 2, the difference between the expected and the actual trend lines illustrate this significantly greater increase observed in intervention areas ($p < .05$).

Social Norms – Perceived support of abstinence until marriage and other safer sexual practices improved

Research in Bangladesh and elsewhere has documented that perceived peer norms exert considerable influence on adolescents'

risk behaviors. Using several items measuring respondents' perceptions of their peers' sexual behaviors and attitudes towards sex, researchers created an index to measure adolescents' perceptions of the social norms within their peer group regarding premarital and higher-risk sexual behavior. Higher scores on this index reflect perceptions that peers are more favorable to abstinence and other safer sexual behaviors. Adolescents' perceptions of their peers' attitudes and behaviors regarding safer sexual behaviors became significantly more favorable between 2004 and 2005 in the intervention areas ($p < .05$), while remaining unchanged in the comparison areas.

Conclusions and Future Work

The results from this study suggest that community-based workshops, implemented using the "Know Yourself" Toolkit, can effectively address some of the psychosocial factors and behaviors related to adolescents' reproductive health. Following a one-year implementation period, adolescents' knowledge of reproductive health topics and their perceptions of the social norms prevalent within their peer groups had improved significantly more in the intervention areas than in the comparison areas. Most striking, premarital sexual behavior among male adolescents in the intervention areas decreased significantly during the implementation period, while remaining unchanged among adolescent males in the comparison areas.

The "Know Yourself" Toolkit intervention is part of the national ARH Communication Program. The Bangladesh Center for Communication Programs (BCCP) developed the program with guidance from a national ARH Working Group, technical assistance from the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health/Center for Communication Programs (CCP) under the Health

Communication Partnership (HCP), and funding support from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID).

The "Know Yourself" program has grown to include radio and TV magazine programs, a TV variety show with mini-drama for youth, an HIV/AIDS awareness campaign, and a national campaign encouraging youth to "Know Themselves" to achieve success. A larger impact evaluation is planned for 2007 which will measure effects of the mass media program and toolkit implementation combined.

Figure 3: Adolescents' perceptions that peers favor safer sexual behaviors, 2004-2005

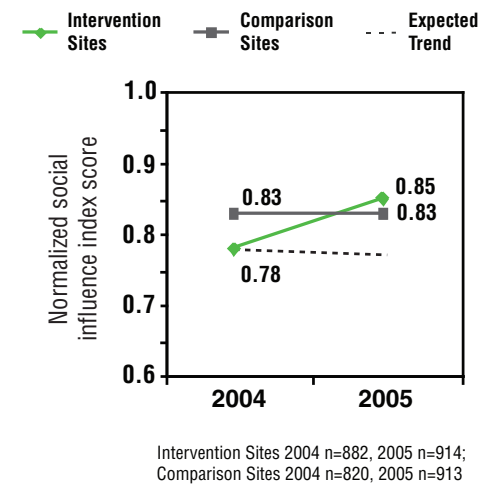
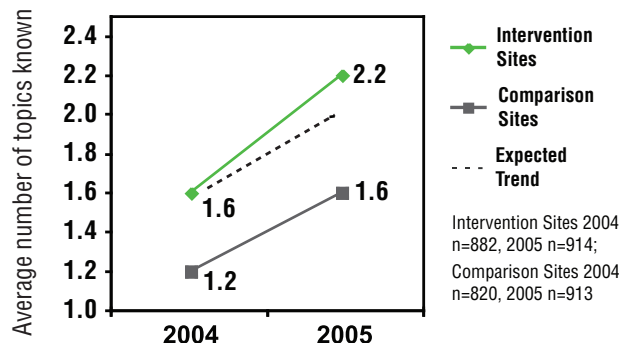


Figure 2: Knowledge of reproductive health among adolescents, 2004-2005



COMMUNICATION Impact!

Summarizes research and programmatic findings from the Health Communication Partnership (HCP) and other bilateral agreements.



HEALTH COMMUNICATION PARTNERSHIP

Based at the Johns Hopkins School of Public Health/Center for Communication Programs. HCP partners include the Academy for Educational Development, Save the Children, the International HIV/AIDS Alliance, and Tulane University's School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine.



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Brandon Howard, Editor; Teresa Tirabassi, Designer