



Girl Empower Liberia Intervention Baseline Survey Report



Sexual abuse¹ amongst girls in Liberia mandates investigation into its causes and appropriate prevention methods. The IRC is implementing Girl Empower, a community-based mentorship program which seeks to help 13 to 14 year-old girls make healthy life choices, decrease their risk of sexual abuse and improve school attendance rates. The IRC is partnering with Population Council and Innovations for Poverty Action to better understand risks of sexual violence amongst young adolescent girls, as well as assess the efficacy of Girl Empower Liberia.

Evaluation Overview

Country	Liberia
Program	Girl Empower
Research Partner	Population Council, Innovations for Poverty Action, World Bank
Funding	Novo Foundation
Sample	1216 girls
Policy Goal	Prevent sexual violence against adolescent girls

Policy Issue

[Population Council analysis of the 2007 DHS](#) showed that in North-Central Liberia, 46.7% of girls age 10-14 were not enrolled in school and 44.3% were not living with either parent. Overall, 54.4% of girls 15-19 year olds were unable to read. Most (74.7%) girls age 15-19 were sexually experienced, 32.8% of girls this age were married or in a union, and 40.0% had been pregnant at least once. Among girls age 15-24, reports of having experienced violence were common (26.9%) and 7.7% reported that their first sexual encounter was forced. Thirteen percent of girls age 15-24 viewed wife beating as justifiable. Thus, girls aged 13-14 years in Nimba County are a high risk population and appropriate as a target of an intervention to reduce sexual abuse and exploitation.

The Context

Liberia's 14-year civil war was one of the most violent conflicts in all of African history. By its end in 2003, over 250,000 people had been killed and widespread violence against women had been perpetrated. The post-conflict environment continues to foster sexual and gender-based violence, as well as high rates of adolescent childbearing. The simultaneous aftermath of the Ebola epidemic poses further obstacles and creates multifaceted challenges in girls' and young women's lives.

The Intervention

Girl Empower (GE) encourages adolescent girls living in rural areas of Nimba County, Liberia to partake in weekly mentored community-based workshops on life skills, self-care, and financial literacy. Participants' parents and caregivers can also attend monthly discussion groups. In addition to working

¹Sexual abuse includes: (A) Sexual assault (any form of non-consensual sexual contact that does not result in or include penetration, including attempted rape, or unwanted kissing, fondling, or touching of genitalia and buttocks; and (B) rape (non-consensual penetration [however slight] of the vagina, anus or mouth with a penis or other body part, including penetration of the vagina or anus with an object).

directly with girls to prevent sexual and gender-based violence, GE program leaders also train local health and psychosocial care providers to expand and improve services for survivors in the area. The Population Council, IPA and World Bank are evaluating the GE program's efficacy in preventing gender-based violence via a randomized control trial featuring a control group, a standard GE group, and a GE+ group, where girls and their families experienced everything offered by the GE group but are also given small cash incentives to encourage regular meeting attendance.

The Baseline Survey

The GE baseline survey gathered statistics on 13-14 year-old girls' living situations and experiences of sexual violence. This information will allow the team to evaluate the degree to which participation in the year-long GE program significantly impacts instances of sexual abuse and exploitation. We also measured other program aims such as, school participation, social networks, and decision-making skills. Researchers will also investigate whether modest cash incentives to caregivers encourage girls' regular attendance and thereby improve program effectiveness. Research scales include the Violence against Children Surveys (VACS) sexual abuse questions, Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, Gender Relations Scale, and the Children's Revised Impact of Events Scale. 84 villages were ultimately included, surveyed, and analyzed, with 28 villages each assigned randomly to one of 3 program arms. Four teams from Innovations for Poverty Action (IPA), each consisting of four female enumerators and one female team leader, interviewed all respondents and collected survey data at each participant's residence.

Baseline Findings

- Rates of sexual abuse experienced by young adolescent girls are among the highest in the region.
- Almost four in ten girls (38.32%) had at least experienced one of four types of sexual abuse measured:
 - 28.87% of girls reported having ever been touched in sexual way without their permission.
 - 24.67% of girls reported that someone had unsuccessfully tried to have sex with them against their will.
 - 8.39% of girls had been coerced/persuaded, and 7.81% had been physically forced, to have sex.
 - 10.65% of girls had been given money, gifts or favors in exchange for sex.
- 20.72% girls reported having experienced penetrative sex; average debut age for these was 12.3 years.
- Among girls who had ever had sex, 71.43% reported they had consented to the first instance; 13.89% reported the first time was physically forced; 14.68% reported having been tricked into the first instance.
- 87.3% of sexually experienced respondents indicated not using a condom at last intercourse; 68.65% of reported never having used a condom during intercourse in the past year.
- Nearly 50% indicated having experienced physical abuse, such as being hit or kicked.

Nearly 4 in 10 rural girls aged 13-14 years in Nimba County, Liberia have experienced some form of sexual abuse.

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