

HIV-Related Knowledge, Behaviors, and Exposure to the Life Orientation Curriculum among Grade-8 Learners in Mpumalanga



High-school students in South Africa. Photo: Lindahl

BACKGROUND

In 2015, the South Africa Department of Basic Education (DBE), with support from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), invested in developing and piloting scripted lesson plans (SLPs) to increase the uniformity of the implementation of the sexuality education sections of a Life Orientation (LO) curriculum for learners. The Education Development Center (EDC) began piloting the SLP in the 2016 school year.

With support from USAID, and in partnership with DBE, MEASURE Evaluation is conducting an impact evaluation of the activity before it is rolled out nationally. The evaluation examines the effect of the SLP on herpes simplex virus 2 (HSV-2) incidence and the change in prevalence of pregnancy among a cohort of Grade-8 female learners as they progress to Grade 10. The study also examines the secondary outcomes of school retention, knowledge, attitudes, and risk behaviors of male and female learners in Grades 8, 9, and 10. The study employs a two-arm, stratified, cluster design with data collection at baseline, midline, and end line. Data are being collected from five education districts in two provinces. This fact sheet presents baseline results from 1,618 Grade-8 female learners and 1,353 Grade-8 male learners enrolled in 44 study schools in Mpumalanga in the 2016 school year.

KEY FINDINGS

Grade-8 male learners were older than Grade-8 female learners by a little more than one-half year. Both female and male learners most commonly lived with their mothers. The next most common person for learners to live with was a father or grandparent. About one-third of learners were single orphans, and about one-tenth were double orphans.

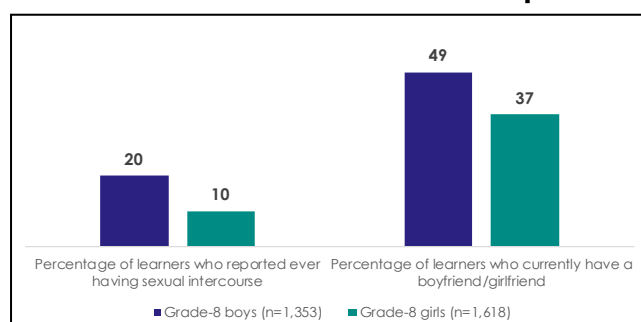
Demographics

	Grade-8 boys (n=1,353)	Grade-8 girls (n=1,618)
Age (mean)	14.3	13.6
Primary caregiver (%)		
Mother	67.9	74.3
Father	12.7	6.4
Grandparent	10.0	11.5
Orphan (%)*		
Single orphan	29.7	28.8
Double orphan	10.7	9.7

*Orphan: Reports parent dead or does not know if parent is alive

In comparison with female learners, a larger proportion of male learners reported ever having sexual intercourse and having a girlfriend or boyfriend at the time of the survey. Females were more likely than males to report having used a condom at last sex, though males and females were equally likely to report using a condom during every sexual encounter in the previous three months. Males were more likely than females to report ever having sex with a person five years older.

Sexual Behavior and Romantic Relationships



Select Sexual Behavior Indicators among Adolescents Who Had Ever Had Sex

	Grade-8 boys (n=286)	Grade-8 girls (n=163)
Age at first sex (mean)	11.5	12.1
Used a condom at last sex (%)	76.2	80.3
Used a condom every time they had sex in the past three months (%)	73.7	73.3
At last sex, gave or received money, gifts, or favors in exchange for sex (%)	42.8	40.0
Ever had sex with a person five years older (%)	28.9	21.2

The majority of males and females had positive perceptions of and experiences with the LO curriculum. More female than male learners in Grade 8 have talked to their parents about the LO topics.

Participation in and Perception of the Life Orientation Curriculum

Percentage of respondents who indicated the following statements are mostly true or very true.	Grade-8 boys (n=1,353)	Grade-8 girls (n=1,618)
The things we learn about gender roles, sexuality, and HIV in the LO class are similar to what I experience in my life.	63.0	63.1
I have learned a lot about sexuality and HIV-related topics in my LO class.	76.2	80.4
I am able to apply some of the things I have learned about gender roles, sexuality, and HIV in the LO class to my personal life.	64.5	70.2
I talk to my parent or caregiver about the sexual and HIV-related topics I learn about in the LO class.	49.4	61.6
My parents/caregiver think it is a good thing that I am learning about HIV and AIDS in school.	79.3	86.8

Both male and female learners reported that their primary source of information on sex, sexuality, and HIV is the LO teacher.

Male and female learners had low to moderate levels of knowledge about sexually transmitted infections (STIs), including HIV, and expressed few aspirations about the future. They had relatively higher levels of perceived self-efficacy, with little difference between Grade-8 female and male learners.

Knowledge of STIs\HIV

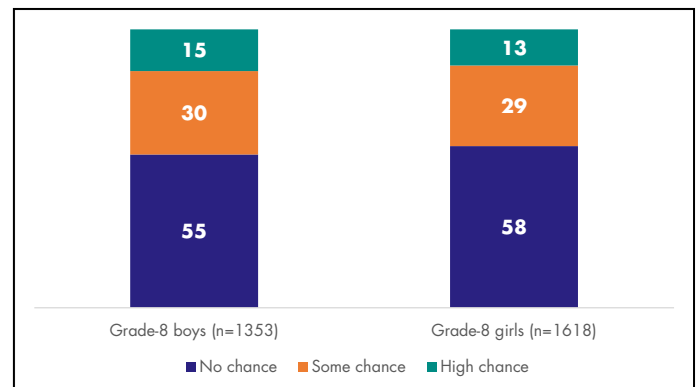
Percentage of respondents who indicated correctly whether the following statements are true or false (correct response in parentheses)	Grade-8 boys (n=1,353)	Grade-8 girls (n=1,618)
You can usually tell if someone has HIV or AIDS by the way they look. (FALSE)	41.8	42.8
Not all sexually transmitted infections are curable. (TRUE)	51.2	44.8
If a mosquito bites you, it can infect you with HIV. (FALSE)	39.4	44.2
You can get HIV from kissing a person who is HIV-positive. (FALSE)	60.9	64.5
A woman who is pregnant can do nothing to prevent her baby from being born with HIV. (FALSE)	44.5	46.3

Self-Efficacy

Percentage of respondents who indicated that the following is true most or all of the time	Grade-8 boys (n=1,353)	Grade-8 girls (n=1,618)
When I have a problem, I can come up with lots of ways to solve it.	46.0	51.7
The things I have done in the past will help me in the future.	54.8	52.9
I believe I can find ways to solve a problem, even when others want to quit.	54.1	58.3
Percentage of respondents who indicated they were confident enough to make the following choices		
Could refuse to start having sex if he or she did not want to, even if friends were having sex	47.0	52.4
Would be able to talk about condoms with a boyfriend or girlfriend if the partner was asking him or her to have sex	70.2	67.1
Felt confident he or she could refuse to have sex, even if someone offered him or her a meal, gifts, money, or a favor	45.9	47.7

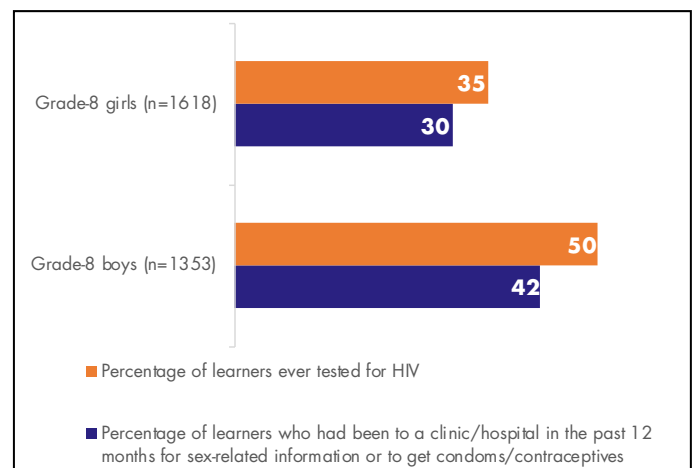
Male and female learners perceived that they had approximately the same degree of likelihood of acquiring HIV during their lifetimes.

Perceived Chance of Acquiring HIV during Lifetime (%)



More males than females had ever been tested for HIV, and more males than females had been to a service delivery point in the past 12 months for sex-related information or to get condoms or contraceptives.

HIV Testing and Other Services



CONCLUSIONS

Grade-8 learners in Mpumalanga value and appreciate what they are learning in their LO curriculum. Gaps in young people's knowledge, aspirations, and self-efficacy can be addressed through the curriculum. Because the majority of young people had never had sex, the LO curriculum is well-placed to address the HIV prevention needs of Grade-8 learners before they become sexually active. Among those who had had sex, about one-quarter of boys and girls did not use a condom every time they had sex in the three months prior to the survey. Additionally, more than one-half of learners believed they have no chance of acquiring HIV in their lifetime. Improving knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors around safer sex is important for these young people.