Reaching the rural in Uganda: a cluster-randomised exploration of community health entrepreneurs' impact on sexual and reproductive health

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Community health entrepreneurship is a sustainable approach to provide sexual and reproductive health care to underserved populations by harnessing the entrepreneurial skills of existing (volunteer) community health workers. This study provides a first evaluation of the impact of the ‘Healthy Entrepreneurs’ social enterprise model. This model may be key in HIV prevention by proactively ensuring rural populations access to the knowledge and means required for increasing and sustaining sexual and reproductive health.

Methods
The study was conducted using tablet-based surveys in a cluster-randomised cross-sectional cohort study. The sample entailed household members from 25 villages in a rural West-Ugandan district. The association between four validated sexual and reproductive health outcome indicators and exposure to community health entrepreneurship was assessed using wealth-adjusted mixed-effects logistic regression models.

Results
Data were obtained from 1202 household members who volunteered to participate (83% female). Table 1 shows the wealth-adjusted odds ratios per indicator. The results show that household members who lived in areas where community health entrepreneurs were active had both higher odds on currently using modern contraception and having knowledge of modern contraceptive methods, sexually transmitted infections, and the symptoms of sexually transmitted infections.

Conclusion
In areas where community health entrepreneurs were active, participants had higher odds on using modern contraceptives and had more knowledge of modern contraceptive methods and sexually transmitted infections. This study thus provides evidence of the key role that community health entrepreneurs have in preventing HIV infection and transmission by guaranteeing underserved populations access to sexual and reproductive health products, services, and knowledge.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>♂ (n=203)</th>
<th>♀ (n=999)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge of modern contraception</td>
<td>6.49 (2.46;17.17)</td>
<td>8.24 (2.56;26.47)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current use of modern contraception</td>
<td>1.63 (0.60;4.40)</td>
<td>2.12 (1.35;3.33)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge of STIs</td>
<td>2.04 (1.01;4.12)</td>
<td>1.81 (1.08;3.03)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge of symptoms of STIs</td>
<td>3.58 (1.86;6.87)</td>
<td>1.63 (1.02;2.60)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Contact information
Robert (Twitter: @RAJ_Borst) is a health systems researcher at Erasmus School of Health Policy & Management. His research activities center around two themes: a) studying how knowledge platforms in health research are constructed and evolve over time and b) studying global health systems research practices, including the mapping of persisting controversies and inequities (e.g. Hasnida et al., 2016). Please feel free to get in contact during AIDS2018 or by scanning the QR-code below using your smartphone’s camera or a third-party app.

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