



Research Question

Does an intervention for early adolescents that addresses gender norms, gender-based violence (GBV), and sexual and reproductive health (SRH) lead to more equitable gender roles, delayed sexual debut and pregnancy, and increased family planning use over the life course?



Social Norms Addressed

- Puberty and sexuality are not discussed with adolescents.
- Education is prioritized for boys and not for girls.
- Lower social status of women and girls prevents equal distribution of opportunities, resources, and household roles, and leads to GBV.



Partners

Save the Children, Georgetown University's Institute for Reproductive Health, Johns Hopkins University's Global Early Adolescent Study and Kinshasa School of Public Health



Location

Kimbanseke & Masina communes
Kinshasa, DRC



Timeline

October 2015 – September 2020

Growing Up GREAT!

Challenges & Opportunities

In urban Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), adolescents face significant barriers to sexual and reproductive health (SRH), including low educational levels, widespread gender-based violence (GBV), and inadequate services. As a result, only 18%-24% of sexually active girls ages 15-19 years use a modern method of contraception, and 12.5% have already been pregnant or given birth.

Early adolescence, ages 10-14 years, represents a critical window for intervention before most youth become sexually active and gendered attitudes and behaviors coalesce. Gendered expectations regarding appropriate behavior, especially in the realm of sexuality and reproduction, influence the ability of adolescents to make informed decisions, forge healthy sexual relationships, and access services across the life course.

Despite recognition of the importance of working with early adolescents, evidence to guide programming is in its infancy. While many SRH programs focus on older adolescents, few address transitions through puberty. Only a handful have been rigorously evaluated, and few have explored the formative role of gender; used rigorous evaluation methods, or followed participants over time. The Growing up GREAT! study seeks to fill this evidence gap by assessing the longitudinal effects of gender transformative puberty and sexuality education.

About the Intervention

Growing Up GREAT! adapts elements of two tested models—Gender Roles, Equality, and Transformations (GREAT) from northern Uganda and GrowUp Smart from Rwanda—for an urban DRC setting. Growing up GREAT! applies an ecological perspective addressing spheres of influence—individual, family, school, community—that most affect early adolescent life experiences. It consists of a toolkit of age-tailored, gender-transformative materials exploring SRH, GBV, and gender equality. Targeting four audiences, the intervention encourages reflection and dialogue through community group engagement to build more equitable gender norms that support adolescent development and well-being.



VERY YOUNG ADOLESCENTS in and out of school (80 schools and 24 youth groups) are reached with games, stories, and puberty books to foster reflection and peer and parent dialogue, and improve SRH knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors. Girls and boys also participate in health exchange visits with providers to encourage future use of services.



PARENTS & CAREGIVERS view testimonial videos of parents who exemplify positive parenting behaviors such as talking about puberty changes, and treating their sons and daughters equally. After viewing the videos, they participate in facilitated discussions designed to support new behaviors.



TEACHERS & PROVIDERS participate in orientation and receive Growing Up GREAT! materials to engage students. Teachers can use materials to support life-skills sessions. Providers facilitate puberty sessions and host adolescents at their facility.



COMMUNITY MEMBERS play a fun, life-sized game that sparks community dialogue to promote gender-equitable expectations for adolescents.

What we hope to achieve

By working together with adolescents, parents, and teachers, we aim to improve inter-generational communication about puberty and sexuality, increase knowledge, and foster more equitable gender norms. As adolescents transition through the life course, this foundation will lead to improved SRH through reduced GBV, use of health services, and increased family planning use. We will also develop the capacity of local organizations to sustain and expand the intervention.

Evaluation

Growing Up GREAT! will be evaluated as part of the longitudinal Global Early Adolescent Study. The evaluation uses a quasi-experimental longitudinal design to compare changes in gender norms and SRH outcomes between cohorts of 1,000 in-school 10-14 year-old intervention participants and 1,000 in-school non-

participants. Additionally, a cohort of 400 out-of-school participants will be compared to 400 out-of-school non-participants. While the 12 month-long Growing Up GREAT! intervention will end in 2018, the evaluation will continue to follow study participants, providing critical information on how gendered changes that occur during early adolescence play out in older adolescence—a critical but understudied area.

Scale & Sustainability

Growing Up GREAT! was designed with simple, easy-to-use materials that require minimal resources, feasible to scale. Implementing partners have laid the ground work for expansion by establishing a Stakeholder Reference Group consisting of governmental, NGO, and donor representatives to guide development and implementation. The Reference Group is using the WHO/ExpandNet scale-up model to guide scale-up planning. If early results are promising, Growing Up GREAT! will be expanded and the process documented to provide insights into the scale-up of normative early adolescent interventions operating in after-school and community contexts.



BILL & MELINDA
GATES foundation

Passages

www.passagesproject.org