

A Validation Study of Puberty and Gender Workbooks for Very Young Adolescents in Cochabamba, Bolivia

Kathleen Trocin¹, Caroline de Hilari²

¹Emory University Rollins School of Public Health, ²Save the Children

Background and Objectives

Very young adolescents (VYA) are young people between the ages 10 and 14. Very young adolescence is a critical formative period in a young person's biological and social development. Recognition of the importance of this stage of development is growing within the public health field. However, health programs and research targeting this group are still lacking.

Sexual and reproductive health indicators in Bolivia, including low rates of modern contraceptive use, high incidence of intimate partner and sexual violence, and limited access to water and sanitation to support menstrual hygiene, demonstrate that there is a need for VYA-focused interventions in the country.

Save the Children's puberty and gender workbooks are one such intervention focused on VYA health in Bolivia and are the subject of this research. The workbooks were developed for VYA in Cochabamba, a city located in central Bolivia.

This study sought to evaluate the acceptability and impact of the Save the Children puberty and gender workbooks for VYA in Cochabamba, Bolivia.



"Big sisters" in a Save the Children Bolivia partner school with menstrual hygiene educational materials.

Methods

Data collection took place in Cochabamba, Bolivia over a period of three months (June-August 2015). All data was collected in Spanish. Three primary data collection methods were used:

1. Interviewer-led pre-post surveys were implemented among VYA in order to measure their knowledge and attitudes surrounding the biological and social aspects of puberty and their behavioral intentions and self-efficacy to manage these changes before and after reading their gender-specific workbook. A multi-stage cluster sampling design was used to randomly sample schools, classrooms, and then VYA to participate in the surveys.
2. In-depth interviews were conducted among VYA after the posttest survey was implemented to further explore satisfaction with the workbooks and any changes in puberty knowledge, attitudes, self-efficacy or behavior after reading the workbooks.
3. Focus groups were conducted to explore parents', teachers', and school administrators' acceptability of workbook content and design and their perspectives on their involvement in workbook use.

Girls' and boys' versions of the puberty and gender workbooks



Additional Information

Contact: Kathleen Trocin, kathleenetrocin@gmail.com
Caroline de Hilari, chilari@savechildren.org

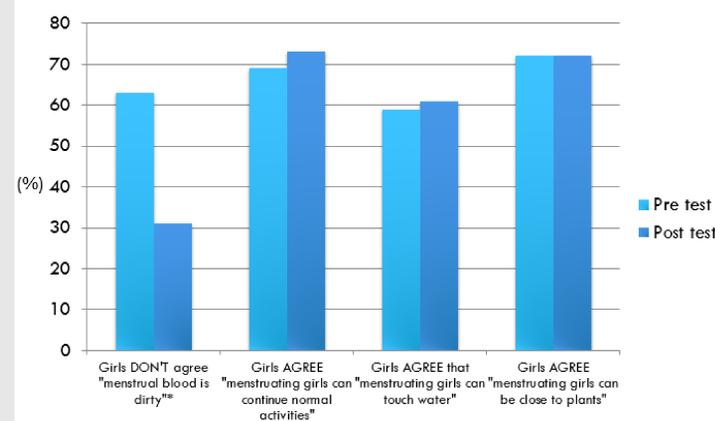
Results

A total of 600 VYA in 4th, 5th, and 6th grades at 15 Save the Children partner primary schools participated in the study. A total of 11 VYA participated in in-depth interviews. A total 12 school staff, including teachers and school administrators, participated in the evaluation from 5 different partner schools. Also, 5 mothers of boys and girls in 4th, 5th, and 6th grades from 3 partner schools participated.

Survey results showed that:

- Girls and boys were better able to identify puberty changes after reading the workbook. Girls and boys were better able to identify what menstruation is after reading the workbook.
- Boys' attitudes surrounding menstruation showed more improvement than girls' attitudes. In fact, after reading the workbook, survey results showed that more girls thought menstrual blood is dirty (see graph below).
- Gender attitudes and intentions surrounding peer pressure and other dangerous situations among VYA started out very positive and overall did not significantly change after reading the workbook.

MENSTRUATION ATTITUDES AMONG GIRLS



*Significant difference at $p=.05$ between pre and post test

*Significant differences at $p=.05$ from control group at post test

In-Depth Interview Results showed that:

- There were no specific patterns found among boys when asked which parts of the workbook they liked most. The majority of girls reported that they particularly liked the sections focused on menstruation.
- Boys and girls reported that they disliked stories that contained serious content but no resolution.
- Although boys and girls reported that they had learned a lot about the changes that happen during puberty, several noted that they were still confused about exactly why or how these changes occur.
- Fear of menstruation was a theme present in some girls' interviews. In both cases, the girls reported feeling more fearful about menstruation after reading the workbook.

Focus Group Results showed that:

- The workbooks received overwhelmingly positive feedback from school staff and mothers. The groups reported that they were very satisfied with the content, format, and design of the workbook.
- Mothers of girls and school staff reported liking the girls' workbook sections on menstruation. In particular, they reported liking the sections that teach girls how to use sanitary pads, track their menstruation on a calendar, and manage their menstrual pain.
- Mothers of boys preferred the boys' workbook sections that described the physical and emotional changes that occur when boys begin puberty.

Conclusions

Considering the study's limitations and triangulated results, several recommendations were made for the improvement of the next version of these workbooks and a set of puberty and gender workbooks that were distributed in the Beni region of Bolivia. Following the study, several changes were made to the workbooks according to these recommendations. These changes included:

- Resolutions were added to stories about sexual violence and peer pressure to make VYA more comfortable with the plotlines.
- Material was added that emphasized that menstruation and menstrual blood is not dirty.
- The sections on gender in both girls' and boys' workbooks were expanded since most VYA already demonstrate positive attitudes about the topics presented in these sections. These sections incorporated more nuanced gender topics such as relationship education.

The results of this study not only helped inform subsequent versions of these workbooks, but also contribute to the evidence base on how to create effective and culturally sensitive interventions to promote health among VYA more broadly.