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Senegal: Community education program increases dialogue on FGC

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Senegal *Female genital cutting*

OR Summary 54

Community Education Program Increases Dialogue on FGC

A broad-based community educational program that also includes social mobilization increased participants' awareness of human rights, women's health, and reduced support for female genital cutting. The program has been scaled up in Senegal and replicated in Burkina Faso and Guinea.

Background

From 2000 to 2003, FRONTIERS collaborated with the Senegalese nongovernmental organization Tostan to evaluate the effects of a community-based education program on awareness, attitudes, and behavior regarding reproductive health and female genital cutting (FGC). The Tostan program provides modules in local languages on hygiene, problem solving, women's health, and human rights. It was designed to improve women's health and promote social change by enabling participants, mainly women, to analyze and find solutions to community problems.

Tostan implemented the education program as part of a scale-up effort in 90 communities in the Kolda district of southern Senegal in cooperation with the Ministry of the Family and Social Development with funding from the GTZ's Supra Regional Project for the Elimination of FGC. About 350 women and 84 men took part in the training. Participating villages established committees to coordinate classes and related public events, and class participants were encouraged to share their new knowledge with others in their villages.

The FRONTIERS evaluation took place as part of the project and compared changes in knowledge, attitudes, and behavior of men and women in 20 villages in the intervention area (including both study participants and nonparticipants) with those living in 20 non-intervention villages. Changes were measured using pre- and post-

intervention surveys of women and men in the intervention and control areas (including nonparticipating men and women in the intervention villages), and qualitative interviews with key community members (including traditional excisors, healers, and local civic and religious leaders). They also assessed pre- and post-intervention changes in the number of girls under 10 who had been cut.

Findings

◆ Overall, 69 percent of participating women and 57 percent of men attended all four modules of the educational program. The main reasons for not taking part in the full program were travel, illness, pregnancy, and lack of time. The human rights and hygiene modules had the highest attendance (nearly 70%), while the problem-solving module had the lowest (less than 33%).

◆ Knowledge about human rights increased significantly among study participants. The proportion of women knowing of their rights to health, education, and a healthy environment showed the greatest increase (from 11% to 94%). Knowledge also increased among men (41% to 92%).

◆ The proportion of men and women who were aware of gender-based violence doubled from about 45 percent to 95 percent—though knowledge also increased significantly in the control area. Over 90 percent of men and women reported that acts of violence had decreased after the Tostan program was implemented.

◆ The intervention significantly improved knowledge about FGC. At baseline, only about 10 percent of men and women could name two consequences of FGC; this proportion increased to 73 percent of women and 66 percent of men. Female participants (92%) and nonparticipants (68%) reported discussing FGC with others.

◆ The proportion of girls aged 10 and under who had not been cut increased significantly (from 46% at baseline to 60% among intervention participant families and 64% among nonparticipating families), but remained unchanged at 48 percent in the comparison group. However, participating families who cut their daughters appeared to be cutting them at a younger age—before age 2.

◆ Approval of FGC and intent to cut girls decreased significantly in both the intervention and control areas, with the greatest changes in the intervention group. The most dramatic decrease in intention to cut occurred among participating women—from nearly three-quarters at baseline (72%) to less than one-quarter at endline (see Table).

◆ In 2002, representatives of about 300 villages in the Kolda region participated in a public declaration denouncing FGC and early marriage, and affirming their intention to protect the health of women and children. While over half of those interviewed in the intervention area felt that the declaration would be respected, many participants believed that broader changes—including enforcement of anti-FGC laws, and continued public discussion—would be necessary to eliminate FGC.

Utilization

◆ The community education model was adapted and found to be effective in Burkina Faso, and is being replicated in several countries in sub-Saharan Africa. Based on feedback obtained in Kolda, Tostan developed a second phase of educational programming, including a greater focus on literacy, math, and project management skills. This phase is being implemented in Guinea and in another region of Senegal.

Attitudes of women and men towards FGC

	Intervention group			Comparison group	
	Baseline	Endline		Baseline	Endline
		Participant	Non participant		
WOMEN (n)	576	333	200	199	200
Approve of FGC	72	16*	28*	89	60*
Will cut daughters in the future	71	12*	23*	89	54*
MEN (n)	373	82	185	184	198
Will cut daughters in the future	66	13*	32*	78	56*
Prefers a woman who has been cut	-	20	40	-	63

*p<0.05

Policy Implications

◆ The holistic approach, combining community education with social mobilization, is an appropriate way to influence social change in the African setting.

◆ Sustaining change in community norms will require a long-term commitment to fostering the rights of young women, improving inter-community links among those who oppose FGC and collaboration between Tostan's efforts and other community development initiatives.

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Source: Diop, Nasfissatou et al. 2004. "The Tostan program: Evaluation of a community-based education program in Senegal," *FRONTIERS Final Report*. Washington, DC: Population Council. Available on our website at www.popcouncil.org/frontiers/frontiersfinalrpts.html or by e-mail: frontiers@pcdc.org

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