

APHIA II Operations Research Project in Kenya



| NEWSLETTER |

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New project to promote positive action for HIV in schools in Kenya

APHIA II Operations Research Project and the Ministry of Education have launched a project to address the needs of young people living with HIV in high schools. The project aims to inspire change in the way school communities confront HIV/AIDS, so that more Kenyan adolescents are informed about HIV/AIDS, the need for early diagnosis and they can also choose to be tested. It is hoped that schools will become supportive environment, where HIV-positive students are free from stigma and discrimination, and where their special needs are met, including counseling and care.

The availability of antiretroviral (ARV) treatment has made it possible for an increasing population of young people (10-19 years) living with HIV to survive longer, and to enjoy a better quality of life. However, a recent study by APHIA II OR Project show that only 42% of HIV+ adolescents are in school. The large number of adolescents (58%) who were out of school is an indication of how extremely vulnerable their lives are. It has also been noted that the educational performance of those who attend school is, on average, relatively poor due to frequent absenteeism due to poor health and challenges faced within the school environment.

HIV+ adolescents present a new challenge to the education sector, a problem compounded by the fact that their needs are largely unknown. Interventions to address their needs are generally non-existent, and in most cases, they remain invisible to the teachers and school managers, who often discover that a child is HIV-positive when it is too late to offer any meaningful support. It is therefore important to find appropriate interventions to support children infected with and affected by HIV in schools, and support them to complete their schooling.



Students at a past event, Nairobi School.

Key Findings:

- *58% of HIV+ adolescents do not attend school.*
- *Educational performance of HIV+ students generally poor.*
- *Absenteeism common, due to poor health.*
- *Stigma and discrimination still a problem in schools*
- *Schools willing to support HIV+ learners but need more information*

For more info on this study, contact:

*Dr Francis Obare,
Principal Investigator,
email: fonyango@popcouncil.org*

*Dr Harriet Birungi,
APHIA II OR Project Director
email: hbirungi@popcouncil.org*

The pilot project

The project is being implemented in eight pilot schools - Nairobi School; Moi Girls; Buruburu Girls; Embakasi Girls; Kahawa Garrison; Maina Wanjigi and Olympic Secondary Schools, as well as Moi Forces Academy. An interactive communication activity will be implemented to sensitize the student body and the school community about the need to know one's HIV status through taking a voluntary test, and to reduce stigma and discrimination towards those living with HIV. The communication activities include development and distribution of printed educational materials (comics and guidebooks), staging of entertainment events, using guest speakers to talk to students, and engaging the students to express their ideas on living with HIV through art and debates.

Research will be conducted to assess students' willingness to accept HIV counseling and testing services and how they would like it to be done. If the results show a positive response, arrangements will be made through the National AIDS and STD Control Programme (NASCOP) to provide counseling and testing services in an appropriate manner that responds to the students' needs. School matrons and nurses will be given training by NASOP in the care and support for HIV+ students.

This project has been designed after extensive consultation with stakeholders in the education sector, including teachers from the pilot schools. Formative research has also been conducted with teachers, parents/guardians, and students in seven of the eight schools to collect information to help design the school-based communication strategy. The findings show that indeed, stigma attached to living with HIV is an issue in schools, and needs to be addressed. Students' responses indicated that a HIV+ student would face difficulties in the school environment.

Teachers interviewed in the formative assessment had very empathetic attitudes towards young people living with HIV, indicating a willingness to welcome supportive activities that would enable these children thrive in school. It was also found that parents are surprisingly accepting of their children seeking HIV counseling and testing services.

"I had a classmate in another school who was HIV+ ... She was intimidated and bullied but I chose to support her. I shared a number of things with her e.g. plates, spoons etc and I didn't get infected.

Her mother died and the girl is still alive and now in Form Four" [Student respondent]



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Population Council
General Accident House
Ralph Bunche Road
P.O. Box 17643 - 00500 Nairobi, Kenya

Tel: +254 20 271 3480/1/2/3
Fax: +254 20 271 3479
Email: hbirungi@popcouncil.org
www.popcouncil.org