

POLICY LESSONS ON IMPROVING EDUCATION OUTCOMES

GENDER INNOVATION LAB FEDERATION EVIDENCE SERIES

Authors - Daniel Halim • Diego Ubfal • Rigzom Wangchuk

GENDER INNOVATION LAB FEDERATION

The Gender Innovation Lab (GIL) Federation is a World Bank community of practice coordinated by the Gender Group that brings together the Bank's five regional GILs: Africa (AFR), East Asia and Pacific (EAP), Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC), Middle East and North Africa (MNA), and South Asia (SAR). Together, they are conducting impact evaluations of development interventions to generate evidence and lessons on how to close gender gaps in human capital, earnings, productivity, assets, voice and agency. With over 188 impact evaluations in 66 countries completed to date, the GIL Federation is building the evidence base for governments, development organizations, and the private sector to increase uptake of effective policies that address the underlying causes of gender inequality.

Significant progress has been made in closing gender gaps in primary and secondary enrollment rates worldwide.

However, girls still have lower expected years of schooling than boys in some regions, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa, and boys have worse educational outcomes than girls in other countries, most notably in Latin America and the Caribbean.¹ Barriers to the continuation of schooling for girls are linked to child marriage, early pregnancies, sexual harassment, and social norms around girls' education.² The COVID-19 pandemic has also impacted schooling of both girls and boys. The transition to remote learning hurt girls who often have fewer technical skills and less access to the internet than boys.³ In other cases, boys had higher economic opportunities than girls and were more likely to drop out from school in response to the economic stress generated by the pandemic.⁴ **The GIL**

Federation is generating rigorous evidence around the world to understand what works, and what does not, in narrowing gender gaps in education. This note presents evidence on three key findings.

FINDING 1. CASH TRANSFERS ARE EFFECTIVE AT DELAYING MARRIAGE AND KEEPING GIRLS IN SCHOOL

Financial resources labeled for girls' education, in the form of conditional cash transfers or scholarships, can improve schooling outcomes. When girls stay longer in

school, they usually marry at an older age and reduce their fertility.

In the Philippines, the EAP GIL evaluated the long-term impacts of a national conditional cash transfer program that was targeted at mothers of girls ages 12-14.⁵ The transfers were randomly allocated at the barangay level (administrative unit). The study shows that girls whose mothers received the conditional cash transfer program for 1.5 years experienced reductions in fertility and delayed marriage until their twenties, in comparison to girls whose mothers lived in control areas not selected for the transfers. Although there were no long-term impacts on labor market outcomes, the evidence suggests that conditional cash transfers targeted during the transition to adolescence can delay adolescent childbirth and marriage and help keep girls in school longer.

The Africa GIL supported a randomized controlled trial (RCT) of a three-year scholarship program targeting Nigerian middle school girls as part of the Sahel Women Empowerment and Demographic Dividend (SWEDD) project. The study finds that the program improved girls' educational outcomes (reducing their likelihood of dropping out of school), postponed marriage, and increased their life satisfaction.⁶ Girls in villages assigned to receive the program were 53 percent less likely to drop out of school and 49 percent less likely to be married than girls in villages not assigned to receive the program.

FINDING 2. LIFE SKILLS TRAINING WITH MENTORS AND PEERS CAN IMPROVE GIRL'S EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

The Africa GIL conducted an RCT to evaluate the Sisters of Success (SOS) program in Liberia, which aimed to support girls' transition into adolescence and adulthood by delivering life skills training through mentors.⁷ Girls ages 12–15 in the treatment group were matched with a volunteer woman mentor from their community who delivered a life skills curriculum focused on building social and emotional skills. The control group was not offered any intervention.

Girls in the treatment group saw improvements in their interpersonal relationships with peers and parents and increases in their educational attainment (both in primary school completion and secondary school enrollment) four years after the program. These impacts were already observed the first year after the program and persisted more than four years after the end of the program. They were detected in both survey data and administrative records. These effects were concentrated among the younger girls (age 12–13 at baseline), suggesting that supporting girls as they transition into adolescence may yield greater impacts. No effects were observed on sexual activity or pregnancy.

The LAC GIL supported an RCT in Brazil to measure the effects of peer-led life skills training focused on reproductive health and goal setting.⁸ High school students served as peer educators to disseminate knowledge. Different selection criteria to choose these peer educators were randomized across schools using social network data elicited at baseline. In one-third of treatment schools, peer educators were selected according to their network centrality. In another third of treated schools, the most popular students, according to their peers' ranking, served as educators. In the remaining schools, students chosen by the school administration disseminated information. Overall, the intervention significantly increased contraceptive use, reduced teenage pregnancy, and increased intended post-secondary school enrollment. Because different types of peer educators reached different students, effects differed by treatment arm. Notably, the treatment had smaller impacts when peer educators were selected by the school rather than by one of the network-based methods.

Baseline data from an impact evaluation conducted by the EAP GIL in Indonesia show that 8th grade boys have, on average, lower grades and school attendance than girls, and these gender differences are linked to their

mindsets, socio-emotional skills, and other behavioral factors.⁹ The results of the impact evaluation show that these mindsets, skills, and behaviors can be taught.

Some 2,100 lower-secondary schools were randomly assigned into three groups: one receiving a six-session curriculum teaching growth mindset and self-management, one receiving the six-session curriculum paired with tools and activities for daily classroom use, and a control group that did not receive any new curriculum.¹⁰ Both interventions shifted some of the socio-emotional skills and study behaviors taught in the training. Impacts were stronger for students from lower socio-economic households, with lower baseline grades, and in lower performing schools. The more intensive intervention with tools and activities for daily use led to some additional improvements for students; however, they came at a higher cost and burden for the schools. Although the impact evaluation shows that in-school training programs can boost targeted skills and behaviors that the literature stresses for academic success, neither intervention led to improved exam scores or aspirations for higher levels of education in the weeks after the program.

FINDING 3. PHONE-BASED OUTREACH CAN IMPROVE ADOLESCENT'S MOTIVATION AND ASPIRATIONS AND ENCOURAGE THEM TO STAY IN SCHOOL

The economic and educational disruptions generated by the COVID-19 pandemic have increased dropout rates around the world. Low-cost interventions, such as phone-based outreach, have proved to be effective at mitigating those effects.

In Bangladesh, the SAR GIL conducted an RCT to estimate the effects of a phone-based outreach program designed to foster a growth mindset among adolescents to overcome the negative impacts of the pandemic on their motivation.¹¹ Adolescents in the study were enrolled in grades 7 and 8 across 109 schools prior to the onset of the pandemic. Students from 73 schools were randomly assigned to participate in the program, while students in the other 36 schools served as a control group. The evaluation finds that the phone outreach was associated with a 9 percent increase in adolescent motivation and aspirations across all genders. The program mitigated the reduction in university aspirations for girls, who suffered more from this than boys during the pandemic.¹²

Another low-cost alternative is the use of text messages. The LAC GIL conducted a pilot study in Ecuador where sexual and reproductive health education was implemented via text messages.¹³ In line with Finding 2, the program used peers to send the information. It was successful at reducing teenage pregnancy and increasing adolescent girls' self-reported educational aspirations as well as school continuation.

FINDING 4. EMPOWERING WOMEN CAN IMPROVE CHILDREN'S EDUCATION

A study by the EAP GIL in Indonesia shows that maternal employment can lead to improved children's

educational outcomes. The study pooled different data sources to construct a dataset with 32,000 observations of children ages 6 to 18.¹⁴ The study used a two-stage least squares strategy exploiting exogenous changes in tariffs on female-intensive sectors to estimate the effects of maternal employment on child health outcomes. The findings indicate that maternal employment can have positive long-term impacts on children's development outcomes. Mothers' employment significantly increased their children's years of schooling and enrollment in school and positively affected health outcomes, such as height for age and hemoglobin levels.





FOR MORE INFORMATION, PLEASE CONTACT

Diego Ubfal
dubfal@worldbank.org

1818 H St NW
Washington, DC 20433 USA
<https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/gender>

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