

Identifying Opportunities for HIV Prevention with Female Migrants in Kenya

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Project Description

This 5-year research program addresses a neglected topic of HIV prevention research: HIV risks to female migrants in sub-Saharan Africa. The research uses mixed quantitative and ethnographic methods to investigate how migration and mobility facilitate women's risks of acquiring and transmitting HIV infection. The first phase of the research in Kisumu, Kenya aims to

- Describe women's patterns of migration and mobility, and the spatial and social features of the common destinations of female migrants
- Identify the social, environmental and structural aspects of women's migration which render it particularly hazardous vis-à-vis HIV risks
- Describe HIV-related beliefs, attitudes and sexual risk behaviors among female migrants

The ultimate aim of this research is to develop and test a multi-level HIV prevention intervention with female migrants in western Kenya.

Significance

Research on migration and HIV/AIDS in sub-Saharan Africa has focused largely on the consequences of male labor migration. Studies consistently find migration to be a risk factor for men and their sexual partners, yet little research has directly investigated the effect of migration on HIV infection risks to women in the region—despite their high levels of mobility and disproportionate burden of HIV infection risk.

Our preliminary research in South Africa found that female migrants were at higher risk of HIV infection than were male migrants, or non-migrants of either sex. Moreover, sexual risk behavior was more likely to lead to HIV infection for female migrants than for female non-migrants, and males of either category. These findings warrant confirmation in other settings in the region, particularly settings, such as western Kenya, where HIV is highly prevalent and women are at a disproportionately high risk of HIV relative to men. If female migrants are particularly vulnerable to HIV infection, targeted HIV prevention efforts are called for, and may serve as an important component of HIV prevention for the region. Moreover, as the HIV/AIDS pandemic continues to mature, population mobility will undoubtedly continue to play a role in its evolving dynamics. A better understanding of the sex-specific patterns of population mobility in the region is necessary both to improve our capacity to control HIV/AIDS and to respond to future emerging infectious disease threats.

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