

Chapter 41

Promoting Sexual Health Education via Gaming: Evidence from the Barrios of Lima, Peru

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ABSTRACT

The spread of contagious STDs, HIV/AIDS, and unintended pregnancies amongst marginalized youth in developing nations is a source of concern. This study examines the use of an educational interactive game to educate Peruvian youth about sexual and reproductive health. 102 teenagers living in the barrios of Lima played an interactive educational multimedia game. The research design consisted of pre- and post-intervention surveys. The study utilized social cognitive theory to determine the influence of prior knowledge, self-efficacy and game-playing on respondents attitudes. In this particular case, prior attitudes, knowledge, resistance to peer-pressure and game-playing were significant predictors of attitudes towards sexual health. Implications and strategies for teachers utilizing interactive games for promotion of sexual education are discussed.

INTRODUCTION

Despite the decline in the number of annual deaths caused by it, AIDS continues to ravage the planet, with two million people succumbing to the disease annually, and an estimated 33 mil-

lion people living with HIV (UNAIDS, 2008a). The disease adds an estimated 2.7 million new cases each year. Certain populations, such as women, adolescents, and children are particularly vulnerable (Kusunoki et al., 2005), possibly due to biological and social factors. A particular cause for concern is the fact that almost half (45%) of new HIV infections occur amongst young people

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aged 15-24, an estimated 12.5 million of whom have AIDS (UNAIDS, 2008a). This is particularly worrying, since knowledge levels regarding HIV prevention amongst the majority of youth are 'well below the *Declaration of Commitment's* goal of ensuring comprehensive HIV knowledge in 95% of young people by 2010' (UNAIDS, 2008a, p. 98). Risk reduction may occur by increasing young people's understanding of sexual and reproductive health, particularly risks associated with HIV and measures to prevent exposure.

This chapter investigates the impact of an interactive multimedia game intended to educate Peruvian youth about sexual and reproductive issues. This study investigated the unique vulnerabilities of adolescents in contracting the disease, the literature on digital education games, and is situated within the context of social cognitive theory (Bandura, 2004). Finally, the findings are presented and implications for teachers and instructors are suggested.

Problem of HIV/AIDS

Trends of pre-marital sex and sexual high-risk behaviors, combined with low knowledge of the consequences of such behaviors, are among some of the factors exacerbating the HIV/AIDS epidemic among adolescents (United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund [UNICEF], 2002). The report produced by the United Nations General Assembly Special Sessions (UNGASS) suggests that the majority of Peruvian AIDS cases are concentrated in young adults, with 70% of people living with HIV aged between 20-39 years (UNAIDS, 2008b). It has been noted that the escalating adoption of premarital sexual activity amongst youth (Gubhaju, 2002; Quek & Li, 2002) increases their chances of contracting sexually transmitted diseases (STDs). Adolescents generally change sexual partners quite frequently, as a result of engaging in several sexual relationships instead of a committed, monogamous relationship

over a longer period (Rector, Johnson, Noyes, & Martin, 2003).

Secondly, youth are vulnerable to STDs because of their tendency to engage in high-risk sexual behaviors (UNICEF, 2002). Some scholars (Loli, Aramburú, & Paxman, 1987; Singh & Wulf, 1991) suggest that Peruvian adolescents are at risk of experiencing the negative consequences of not practicing safe sex. Modern methods of contraception are estimated to be used by half the Peruvian population (Globalis, 2003), with total prevalence, including traditional remedies, as high as 64 percent (Hardee, et al., 1999). However, only 31 percent of sexually active adolescents have used a modern method of contraception (Chirinos, Salazar, & Brindis, 2000). Possible explanations for such risk-intensive behavior include the role of media, and social pressure, combined with a lack of relevant information made available in accessible and appealing formats.

Driven by an encouraging media climate and peer-pressure, youth often fall prey to spontaneous romantic encounters, engage in risky sexual behavior, and fail to consider negotiation, protection or refusal techniques (Ward & Waters, 1999). Both genders exhibit similar practices, though these are theorized to be based on differing motivations. Adolescent girls either have to purchase condoms while in romantic relationships or rely on negotiations with males for their use; none of these strategies are appealing to them (Meekers, & Klein, 2002). Conversely, adolescent boys fall prey to the risk of sexually transmitted diseases due to curiosity, peer pressure and perceptions of invincibility (Gubhaju, 2002; International Women's Health Coalition [IWHC], 2007).

While HIV is transmitted sexually in 73 percent of the cases in Peru (UNAIDS, 2008b), there are social and religious taboos surrounding the discussion of sexuality, and a stigma is attached to pre-marital sex. For groups such as teenagers, the constricting social atmosphere may not only be a barrier to receiving information about sexual and reproductive health, it also acts as a deterrent

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