

Siyakha Nentsha

“Building with Young People”
Enhancing the **health,**
economic, and
leadership capabilities of
highly vulnerable youth



The Isihlangu Health and Development Agency developed a life-orientation programme for KwaZulu Natal that has been piloted locally. The programme is accredited by the South African Qualifications Authority, meaning participants who complete Siyakha Nentsha have an asset that can help them get jobs and further training in the future.

The long-term goal of the programme is to improve the lifelong skills and well-being of adolescents in KZN

The programme provides context-specific strategies to enhance participants’ financial skills, HIV/AIDS and reproductive health knowledge, social support, and future life options.

Young people in KwaZulu Natal face high risks for HIV, teenage pregnancy, school dropout, and unemployment. This all takes place in a context in which home life is fragile—many have already lost or face the impending loss of one or both parents, and the responsibilities of adulthood may come before young people are ready.

Over 1400 learners have participated in Siyakha Nentsha since 2008. The programme was carried out in grades 10-12 and has been rigorously evaluated by the Population Council and UKZN. Results from the programme evaluation are promising.

KEY FINDINGS

Working with both boys and girls can make a difference in the lives of both and impact how they relate to one another
∅

Siyakha Nentsha addresses topics not discussed elsewhere that are important in the lives of young people.
∅

Siyakha Nentsha increases young people’s confidence to prepare for the future and cope with difficult situations
∅

Among boys, Siyakha Nentsha participants were less likely to begin having sex
∅

For females who were having sex, those in the programme used condoms with sexual partners more consistently
∅

SN learners far more successful in opening a bank account
∅

SN girls and boys were more likely to have talked about gender and sexuality issues
∅

Financial decisionmaking was actively discussed by Siyakha Nentsha learners
∅

Siyakha Nentsha students were more likely to talk about ways of a finding a job, interviewing and starting a business

What is Siyakha Nentsha?



Our programme is delivered by teams of trained facilitators from the community. The facilitators, 4 males and 20 females between 20-24 years old, were chosen via a competitive process and were continuously trained throughout the programme. They lead sessions with students 2-3 times per week in classrooms during school hours and each session lasts approximately 1 hour. The facilitators' skills in relating with the learners is one of the key factors that made the programme a success.

Sessions include modules on self-identity, human rights awareness, HIV and AIDS, reproductive health, the value of saving money, accessing banks, job readiness and basic principles around starting a business. Each session is highly interactive and includes time for participation and reflection on the session of the day. Facilitators are also available after session hours to discuss personal issues with learners.

The intervention took place in a peri-urban area called "Ngonyameni," located outside of Durban and adjacent to the township of Umlazi. Like many communities in South Africa, this area is impoverished, food insecure and heavily affected by HIV and AIDS.

Why schools?

As the vast majority of young people in South Africa attend school throughout their teenage years, working through the schools was the most effective way to reach large numbers of participants. Because there was a relatively short window within which to design and implement the programme, we wanted to work with young people who would be able to utilize the skills relatively quickly after finishing school, yet not be distracted by the programme and lose time studying for their matric exams. We determined therefore that learners in grades 10 and 11 would be the most appropriate to start with.



Does the programme work?

We undertook a research study to begin to assess the effectiveness of the programme. The research paid careful attention to who had access to the programme. We wanted to have a group of learners who were "typical" for this type of area. We therefore chose participant classrooms by lottery. This enabled us to avoid any unfairness in who had access to the programme and ensured that we did not work with only the most talented learners, or, alternatively, only those who were the most vulnerable. There were 7 secondary schools in the study area; 6 initially received the programme and the seventh served as a comparison. After the study was over, learners in the control school received a streamlined version of the intervention.

To know about the situation of learners in the area before the intervention began, we interviewed each grade 10 and 11 learner in the area in early 2008. In the interview we asked them questions about their families, schooling, work experience, attitudes and values, as well as health knowledge and behaviours. After the intervention finished in late 2009, we returned to these learners and asked the same questions. This enabled us to know how learners in both the comparison school and the intervention schools had changed during this time period.

Characteristics of the learners in the study

	Males	Females
Average age	19	18
% who are orphans	38	35
% who have ever been pregnant	—	19
% who say their household doesn't have enough money for basic necessities	19	23
% whose homes are connected to electricity	96	92
% who did not have food to eat the morning of survey	10	14
% who walk to school	88	82
% who have ever worked	18	8



Over a third of young people in the study have lost a parent to death: 20% are without mothers, 30% without fathers and 10% have lost both of their parents. Many learners live with grandmothers, siblings, aunts or uncles. Over twenty

percent of participants in the programme reported that their household did not have enough money for food, much less other basics. Most households were connected to electricity. Eighty eight percent of households had a grant recipient. Disconcertingly, 10% of boys and 14% of girls did not have any food to eat the morning they were interviewed. Although schools are often located far from learners' homes, transport is lacking and most learners walk to school. Around 10% of girls, however, reported taking a taxi to school most days, possibly to avoid unsafe situations that can arise when girls walk alone. Reflecting the lack of employment opportunities in the area, only a small number of participants have ever undertaken work for which they were paid: 17% of boys and 8% of girls.

Siyakha Nentsha is unique

While many programmes for young people in South Africa attempt to reach them with information about HIV and AIDS, Siyakha Nentsha also gives young people a chance to discuss and learn about critical issues that aren't generally addressed anywhere else. These normally neglected topics are critical in young people's lives. This chart shows the difference in what learners in the programme recall discussing compared to learners who are not in the programme (statistical significance is shown by the *). For many participants – especially boys – this was their first opportunity to touch upon these themes. For instance, males who were part of Siyakha Nentsha had significantly higher rates than control group males of discussing sexuality, sexual violence/abuse, gender relations and saving money.



Have you discussed...	Males		Females	
	No Prog	SN	No Prog	SN
Self-esteem, attitudes, and values	82	94*	78	89*
Sexuality	85	97*	86	92
Violence and sexual abuse	74	96*	82	93*
HIV/AIDS	91	93	88	92
Financial decisionmaking	65	87*	61	85*
Interpreting data	59	81*	51	78*
Looking for work	62	87*	69	84*
Career guidance	68	91*	71	88*
Saving	35	85*	63	80*
How to start a business	58	86*	63	80*
Social grants	41	84*	41	81*
Gender relations	53	90*	61	83*

Confidence and planning increase future chances for success

The programme also devoted substantial time to helping young people think about their self identities, goals and sense of worth. Siyakha Nentsha participants, especially boys, had much higher rates of having discussed self-esteem, attitudes and values. They also felt more hopeful about their futures and believe they had a number of good qualities. Participants were much more likely to report being able to express their ideas to others. Moreover, they were more able to put these ideas into practice.

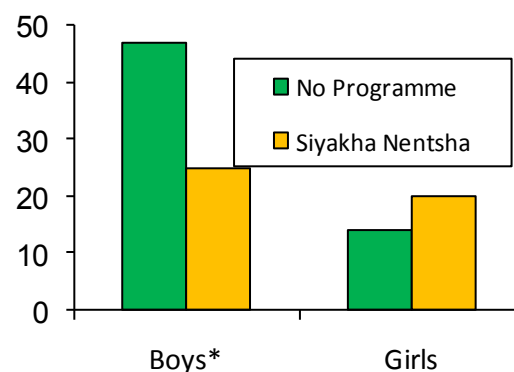
	Males		Females	
	No Prog	SN	No Prog	SN
I feel like I have a number of good qualities	76	89*	88	87
I feel like I can express my ideas to others	85	95*	88	94
I don't have any hope for the future	21	12	22	13
I feel as intelligent as most people my age	82	92	78	87

Siyakha Nentsha makes a difference in the way learners feel about themselves and the way they are able to navigate the world. The financial education and career guidance offered by the programme also appear to have made a lasting impression on participants. Siyakha Nentsha males and females had much higher rates having discussed financial decision making, careers, starting a business and looking for work. Programme learners were also more likely to have greater knowledge of the range of social grants available in South Africa, including eligibility criteria for each grant. Ability to answer maths questions was also higher among Siyakha Nentsha participants. More than two-thirds of participants reported they would have benefited by having the programme at an earlier grade.

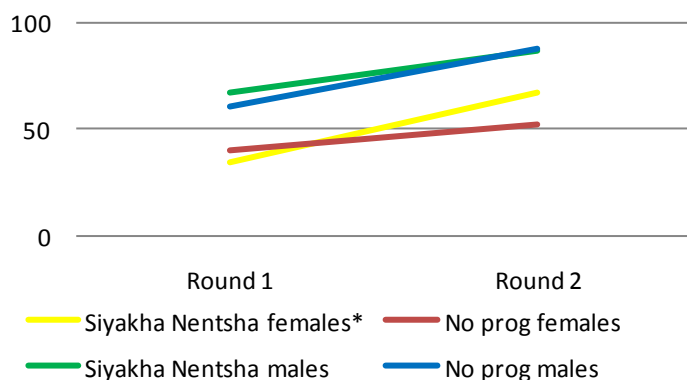
Healthy decisions, healthy future

Over and above this increased exposure to information on gender relations, self-identity and sexual health among programme participants, the programme also appears to have impacted on a number of behavioural outcomes. There is evidence, for example, that a significantly smaller percentage of male participants (compared with non-participant males) sexually debuted (had sex for the first time) between the baseline and follow-up surveys. Among females, there were no detectable impacts on sexual debut, but encouraging changes in condom use were observed.

Who started having sex?
Learners who did not participate were less likely to remain abstinent than learners in Siyakha Nentsha

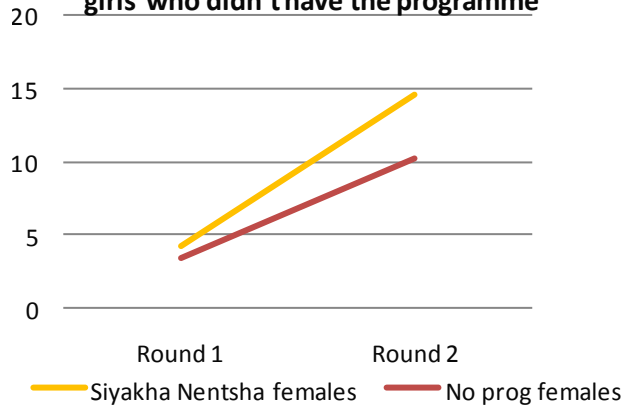


Confidence in ability to use condoms correctly increased significantly among programme participants compared to those with no programme

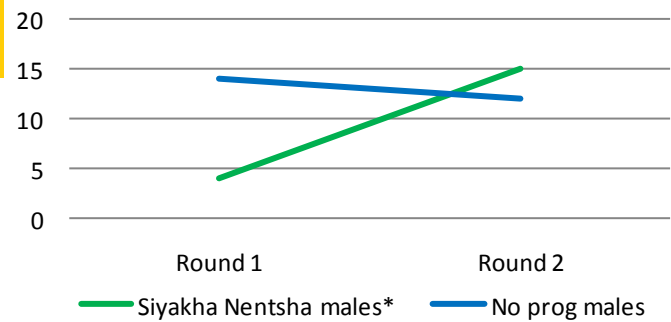


Female participants reported a significant increase in confidence in the ability to use a condom effectively after completing the programme. Moreover, this increase in confidence seems to have translated into more consistent condom use. Among sexually active female participants, for example, there was a significant rise in the proportion that reported regularly using a condom with their most recent partner.

Siyakha Nentsha girls significantly increased their consistent condom use compared to girls who didn't have the programme



Siyakha Nentsha participants were more able to successfully open a bank account



Siyakha Nentsha prepares young people for lives as productive adults

Siyakha Nentsha also had an impact on concrete skills that help prepare young people for their future. One of the key objectives of the programme was to help learners develop financial goals and to enhance their financial literacy. Accordingly, programme participation appears to be associated with changes in financial behaviour. A substantial and (marginally) significant percentage of female programme participants, for example, started to save for the future during the course of the programme. In addition, both male and female programme participants engaged with financial institutions in the formal sector. There was a large and significant increase in the proportion of participants that tried to open a bank account. Moreover, programme participants were much more likely to succeed in opening a bank account than non-programme participants.



Comprehensive programmes like Siyakha Nentsha are the way forward

Some programmes are moving beyond talking just about condoms to also addressing the social and economic context of HIV, including financial empowerment, human rights and the ability to navigate the adult world. Programmes such as *Siyakha Nentsha* in KwaZulu Natal bring these issues together, along with HIV and AIDS - in an environment in which young people can speak freely and are mentored by trained young adults from their own community. This type of life orientation can provide young people with useable skills that lower HIV risk behaviours, increase their financial empowerment and enhance their ability to cope with the stresses of growing up in a difficult environment. A critical component of the success of *Siyakha Nentsha* was working with both young men and young women, as both were shown to benefit from this kind of programme. It also changed the way girls and boys relate to one another by increasing their understanding and appreciation of the opposite sex. Skills-building provided by young adults from the same community was shown to increase the participation and engagement of participants — transforming the programme from a passive to an active one. Building together with young people—*Siyakha Nentsha*—can help lead to a brighter future for South Africa.

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