Reviewer's report

Title: The Reach and Impact of Social Marketing and Reproductive Health Communication Campaigns in Zambia

Version: 1 Date: 19 June 2007

Reviewer: Marc Boulay

Reviewer's report:

General

The paper assesses the effects of reproductive health and social marketing communication campaigns on condom use in Zambia. The paper itself is well-written and its methodology is appropriate to the research questions under study. However, some issues need to be addressed before it is suitable for publication.

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Major Compulsory Revisions (that the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached)

Several papers have documented the positive effect of communication programs on condom use, both in Zambia and elsewhere. Given the literature on this subject, the authors should consider strengthening the introduction of the paper to more clearly articulate the rationale for the paper and its contribution to the field.

There is little overlap between the section describing the communication campaigns in Zambia and communication campaigns measured in the survey. The description of the programs should focus on the programs included in the analysis. The authors categorize the programs measured in the survey as “programs about family planning and HIV/AIDS.” It would be useful to know which, if any, programs emphasized family planning and which emphasized HIV. It would also be useful to know which family planning methods, other than condoms, were promoted by the family planning programs.

The authors indicate, but do not show, that no endogeneity problems were identified. While these tests do not necessarily warrant their own table, some information about these tests should be provided in the text. For instance, the authors may consider providing the range of the p-values for the significance tests examining whether the residual term from the model predicting exposure was significant. Since they cite Bollen et al., the authors presumably included the actual exposure variable and the residual to examine endogeneity. Some have questioned whether this approach underestimates the extent of endogeneity, due to the collinearity between the actual term and the residual, and have suggested using the predicted term in combination with the residual. Borderline significance tests with the “weak” approach may suggest the presence of some endogeneity.
Minor Essential Revisions (such as missing labels on figures, or the wrong use of a term, which the author can be trusted to correct)

Since some of the programs were promoting family planning and not simply HIV prevention, these programs may have prompted some couples to use a contraceptive method other than a condom. This complicates the interpretation of the estimates of program effect, since some respondents affected by the program may be misclassified with non-users of condoms. This may be particularly important in the analyses among women, few of whom reported having sex with a non-regular partner. The authors should consider addressing this possible misclassification in their analyses.

The authors include some ideational variables, such as awareness of where to obtain a condom and perceived ability to obtain a condom, which may actually serve as intervening variables between program exposure and condom use. Including these variables may underestimate the effect of the programs on condom use if these programs sought to increase condom use by increasing awareness of condom sources or increasing confidence in ability to obtain condoms. The authors may consider examining the extent to which these variables reflect an indirect effect of the program on condom use.

The authors should provide some discussion on the limitations of the study. One particular limitation is the low predictive power of some of the models predicting exposure.

Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

Since the programs being evaluated are both FP and HIV related, the background section should probably include some discussion of the FP situation in Zambia.

It would be useful to see or know the distribution of the exposure count variables. Often, these variables are highly skewed or have a high response on 0.

What next?: Accept after minor essential revisions

Level of interest: An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: Yes, and I have assessed the statistics in my report.

Declaration of competing interests:
'I declare that I have no competing interests'