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**GEORGIA HIV
PREVENTION PROJECT**

Operations Research Brief

Evaluation of the Effectiveness of a Healthy Lifestyles Curriculum among Students of Secondary Schools in Tbilisi and Telavi

Introduction

The USAID-funded Georgia HIV Prevention Project (GHPP) is a 5-year effort that began on February 4, 2010 to support HIV prevention among high-risk groups in order to avert the spread of HIV to the general population. GHPP, which was awarded to RTI International (RTI) and its subcontracting partners Save the Children-U.S. (SC) and Program for Appropriate Technologies in Health (PATH), works with local partners and counterparts to develop and implement HIV prevention activities for most-at-risk populations, including at-risk youth.

As part of its youth-focused component, GHPP is expanding HIV prevention outreach and education to young people through pilot testing of a consolidated Healthy Lifestyles Curriculum (HLC) in partnership with the Ministry of Education and Science (MOES) of Georgia. To assess the effectiveness of the HLC and propose recommendations to MOES for its expansion, GHPP designed and conducted an operations research study of the HLC pilot within secondary schools.

Why is a school-based Healthy Lifestyles education intervention important?

It is widely recognized that the transition from adolescence to adulthood is one of the most important phases in terms of establishing lifelong habits and behaviors that affect one's health. It is also a key period for developing life skills that will help adolescents navigate a healthier life. International evidence supports the cost-effectiveness of school-based interventions designed to prevent the uptake of smoking and drug and alcohol use, as well as to provide HIV prevention information among children and young people.

Therefore, the World Health Organization and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization have recommended and provided guidelines for integrating healthy lifestyles information as a key component of school curricula worldwide.

How has the Healthy Lifestyles education been developing in Georgia?

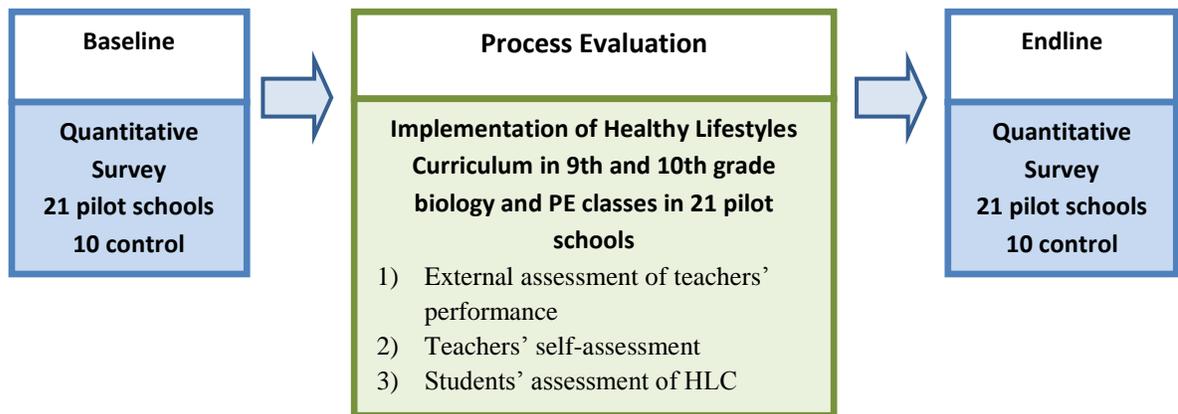
Over the past decade, a number of initiatives have been carried out to support healthy lifestyles education among youth. These initiatives, mostly supported by international donors and other organizations, have assessed the need for healthy lifestyles education, for teachers and others to be trained in healthy lifestyles topics, and for the development and dissemination of information, education, communication (IEC) materials. However, these were small-scale initiatives with limited coverage of the population and country; thus, they were unsustainable. Most previous projects designed their own curricula, adapted from internationally recognized sources, and implemented these curricula through extracurricular or elective subjects, coordinating only with local education authorities. As a result, students' access to this information was limited to only those who self-selected to partake in the activity, was not uniform at a national level, and was dependent on the funding cycles of the projects of donors and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs).

What has been done within the Georgia HIV Prevention Project?

In 2010, GHPP formed a working group that included the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), and other international and local stakeholders to promote a more uniform, sustainable approach to HLC. Thanks to the advocacy efforts of this working group, healthy lifestyles topics have been included into the National Education Plan (NEP) that was officially endorsed by MOES in March 2011.

In addition, based on the recommendations of the working group, GHPP, in partnership with the NGO Bemoni Public Union (BPU), developed a 9th and 10th grade HLC with accompanying teacher guides and student handbooks. This HLC pilot was then implemented in 14 secondary schools in Tbilisi (capital) and 7 schools in Telavi (Kakheti region) during biology and physical education (PE) classes. GHPP then conducted an evaluation of the HLC pilot to measure the effectiveness of its implementation in the 21 pilot secondary schools (as compared with 10 control secondary schools selected in Tbilisi and Telavi) and provided technical recommendations to MOES on scaling-up and institutionalizing the use of the HLC.

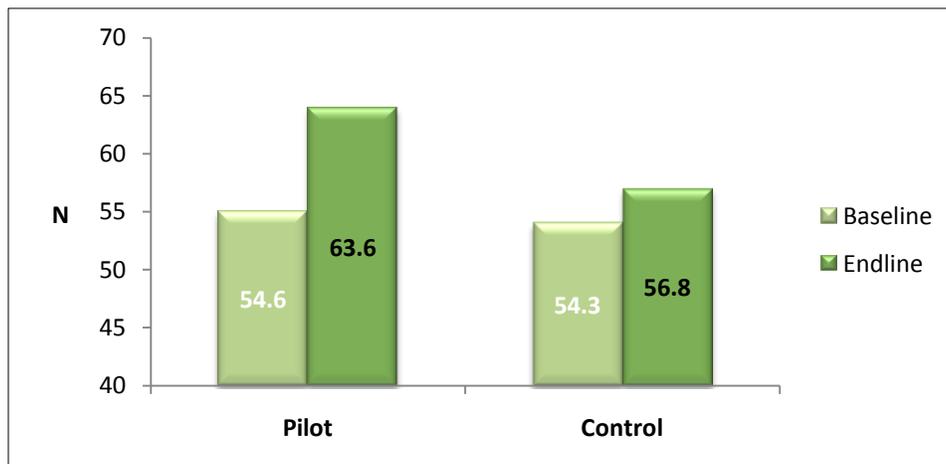
Figure 1. Summary of Evaluation Methodology



What are the major findings of the HLC pilot?

This evaluation showed that, on average, students at the pilot schools answered 6.5 more questions correctly on the endline survey than did students at the control schools, which is a relative and statistically significant difference of 11 percent. These results remained true when controlling for gender and grade. Based on these results, the HLC pilot had a positive effect on students' learning and teachers' ability to deliver information that can protect young people's health and wellbeing.

Figure 2. Average Number of Correct Answers (p <0.01, difference in differences test)



What was found through the HLC pilot process evaluation?

Overall, 148 lessons were conducted by PE teachers (107 in Tbilisi and 41 in Telavi) and 210 lessons by biology teachers (140 in Tbilisi and 70 in Telavi). In total, 27 lessons were assessed from 19 out of the 21 schools. For each of the lessons chosen, all three assessment tools (i.e., teacher performance assessment tool, student assessment tool, and teacher self-assessment tool) were completed. Based on external assessment of teachers' performance, it was found that few of the teachers used an interactive teaching approach with students, most likely due to the lack of adequate experience in using this method. In comparison to PE teachers, biology teachers were rated as being better at conducting interactive group discussions. PE teachers experienced greater discomfort because the theme and the format for conducting classes were unusual for them. Assessments from students indicated that they wished the lessons were more interactive and allowed more time for questions/answers and discussion.

What are the recommendations for policymakers and government officials?

Based on the thorough and collaborative process to consolidate the many healthy lifestyles curricula in Georgia and then successfully test the use of this consolidated curriculum within the formal school system, the working group makes the following recommendations:

- MOES should adopt this tested consolidated version for use in the formal school setting by including it in the upcoming biology textbook revision process.
- GHPP should provide technical assistance to train biology teachers as master trainers in order to support institutionalization of the delivery of the HLC nationwide.

Where can the full version of the operations research study be obtained?

A hard copy of the operations research study report can be obtained at the office of the Georgia HIV Prevention Project (34/36 Kobuleti Str, 0179 Tbilisi, Georgia; Tel: +995 (32) 2 43-82-20; E-mail: info@ghpp.org). The electronic version of the report can be downloaded from www.geoyouth.ge.

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