

The Influence of cross-gender conversational networks on responses to AIDS in rural Malawi

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In this paper, we examine the influence of husbands' (wives') social networks on their spouses responses to AIDS. Social networks in the high prevalence countries of sub-Saharan Africa are quite gendered: women talk with women, men with men. Communication between husband and wife, however, may bridge the gender gap. We use data from a longitudinal survey conducted in 1998 and 2001 for a sample of 1500 ever-married women and 1000 husbands, as well as a variety of sources of qualitative data that provide information on the content of conversations in social networks and between spouses. The data set has information on four sets of variables central to our analysis: 1) responses to AIDS (e.g. perception of risk, whether the individual perceives himself or herself to be infected already); 2) whether both members of the couple agree or disagree on whether a spousal conversation on AIDS occurred, the frequency of the conversations; 3) the gender composition of respondents' social networks; 4) individual characteristics that measure some characteristics believed to be associated with intra-couple power differentials (e.g. age and educational differences between spouses, whether the marriage is monogamous or polygamous). The tabulations of these variables are shown in the table below. We utilize for our analyses several different methodologies, including (a) context analyses of qualitative data, (b) regression analyses of the influence of social interaction and spousal communication on AIDS risk perceptions and AIDS-related behaviors, and (c) fixed effects models to control for unobserved factors that are likely to determine social networks (where possible).

Tables

Husband-Wife age difference:

	Malawi 1	Malawi 2
husband younger	4.54	5.80
husband is 0 to 5 years older	41.30	39.75
husband is 6 or more years older	54.14	54.39

Husband/wife highest level of schooling

N = 919

Table entries are the proportion of couples (in percent)

<i>Wife</i>	<i>Husband</i>					Total
	None	Primary	Secondary	University	Other	
None	12.95	19.91	0.87	0.00	0.22	33.95
Primary	5.88	43.63	10.34	0.11	0.54	60.50
Secondary	0.00	1.63	3.70	0.00	0.22	5.55
Total	18.82	65.18	14.91	0.11	0.98	100.00

% of all NWP's that are same gender as respondent

	Female Respondents	Male respondents
Malawi 1	91.54	92.61
Malawi 2	93.33	94.98

Talked with spouse about AIDS

Malawi 1 (N = 916 couples):

% Agree talked	57.53
% Agree did not talk	9.17
% Discrepant	33.30

Worried about AIDS

Malawi 1 (N = 910 couples):

% Both worried a lot	35.71
% Both worried a little	6.48
% Both not worried	8.13
% Discrepant	49.68

Malawi 2 (N = 1109 couples):

% Both worried a lot	21.73
% Both worried a little	8.48
% Both not worried	16.59
% Discrepant	53.20

Thinks already infected with HIV/AIDS

Malawi 2 (N = 936 couples)

% Both think not infected	49.47
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% Both think low chance of being infected	5.24
% Both think medium chance of being infected	1.07
% Both think high chance of being infected	1.18
% Discrepant	43.04