

THE SOAP-ON-A-ROPE TRIAL FOR IMPROVED HANDWASHING

Adapting and Using Nudge Theory in Zambia

Christina Wakefield¹, Ilenga Nkhata², Tabonga Naluonde², Annie Martin², Laurie Markle², David A. Larsen³, Rim Abdullah³

¹The Manoff Group, Inc.; ²Akros Inc.; ³Department of Public Health, Food Studies, and Nutrition, Syracuse University

OUR GOAL

To assess the effectiveness of nudge theory to improve observed handwashing with soap among primary school-aged children in Zambia

THE CHALLENGE

- Good school sanitation can improve student health, decrease absenteeism and improve learning
- The Zambian Ministry of General Education has improved sanitation across schools, including reshaping policies and guidelines for WASH
- Nevertheless, the practice of handwashing with soap continues to lag, even in the presence of handwashing stations and other infrastructure

WHAT WE DID

- A comparison-control evaluation, with both pre-intervention and post-intervention estimates of handwashing behavior
- Primary outcome: proportion of school-aged children washing their hands with soap upon exiting the latrine
- Measured through latrine-exit observation by an unobtrusive observer at three time points: pre-intervention, 1 month post-intervention, and 3 months post-intervention
- **Our nudge:** a bar of anti-bacterial soap threaded with a piece of rope (Soap-on-a-Rope, or SOAR) given to students going to the school pit-latrines by a teacher or monitor
- Upon return, the teacher or monitor checked its use and reminded the student to use it

WHAT WE FOUND

- Students in the intervention schools were vastly more likely to wash their hands with soap than students in control schools 77% vs. 31%, with an unadjusted odds ratio of 7.23; p value = 0.006
- Increase over baseline was significant, when the same proportion in both intervention and control schools was below 20%
- Handwashing at all rose significantly from baseline in BOTH intervention and control groups, from 40% at baseline to above 70%
- No significant difference was seen between intervention and control
- At three months post-intervention, gains in handwashing with soap were mostly sustained

SO, WHAT WORKS?

- Clear indication of wide-spread implications of creative and innovative applications of nudge theory to handwashing and other hygiene behaviors
- SOAR improves handwashing with soap and should be scaled and continued to be adapted, including establishing models for translating successful practice in schools to improved practices in the home
- Although the data collector was not part of the intervention, it appears that the presence of the collector did influence the behavior of the students, as handwashing at both control and intervention schools increased significantly
- The question of whether underlying social desirability pressure might be leveraged through a system of monitoring for key behaviors like handwashing warrants further exploration

