Youth Empowerment in Marginalised Communities

Evidence from *Activate! Change Drivers*

Justine Burns, Patricia Chirwa, Malcolm Keswell, George Kinyanjui, Rowan Spazzoli and Lindsey Roots

SALDRU/FES Symposium on Social Mobility and Inequality in South Africa

in honour of

Francis Wilson

April 23, 2018

Context

- Low intergenerational mobility affects where you grow up and how you grow up.

- "Distressed" neighbourhoods are poverty traps.

- The vast majority of youth that live in such neighbourhoods become fatalistic which leads to the perpetuation of destructive behaviour (substance abuse, unsafe sex, domestic violence etc.).

- Young people born into these environments form beliefs about the world based on this perverted reality.

- Neighbourhoods become poverty traps when destructive behaviours become the norm.

- Given this premise, what scope is there for public action?

- One option is to provide better opportunities for families by moving them to better neighbourhoods (Ludwig, Duncan, Gennetian, Katz, Kessler, Kling and Sanbonmatsu 2012)

- Another solution: change the behavioural responses to distress by affecting the underlying drivers of fatalism.

- Activate Change Drivers is a youth empowerment programme that directs its efforts to this objective.

Focus Areas

- **"Active" Social Capital:**
  - ▶ cooperation
  - ▶ trust
  - ▶ altruistic giving

- **Preferences:**
  - ▶ risk-taking
  - ▶ time discounting (impatience)

- **Perceptions/Beliefs:**
  - ▶ trustworthiness
  - ▶ corruption

- **Networks:**
  - ▶ across communties
  - ▶ across domains

- **Programme Content:**
  - ▶ self-belief, aspirations, goal-orientation, and resilience
  - ▶ creative thinking and problem solving
  - ▶ healthy lifestyle choices
  - ▶ communication skills, use of technology and social networking
  - ▶ trust building
  - ▶ project management
  - ▶ political engagement

Summary of Findings

- **Approach to measurement:**
  - ▶ mixed-methods approach to elicit preferences and measure outcomes; a combination of "task" *and* "ask"
  - ▶ extensive surveys that were administered to the study participants
  - ▶ incentivised tasks to elicit behavioural outcomes

- **Hypothesised outcomes:**
  - ▶ Outcomes measured through experiments:
    - ★ Increased pro-social preferences: trust, altruism, cooperation
    - ★ Altered preferences: risk aversion, time discounting
  - ▶ Outcomes measured through surveys:
    - ★ Improved mental health and affective states: depression,happiness
    - ★ Improved perceptions/beliefs: trustworthiness, corruption
    - ★ Increased opportunities: employment and entrepreneurial initiative
    - ★ Increased public innovation: civic engagement, bargaining
    - ★ Increased connectedness: innovative social networking

Methodology

- **Pipeline Randomisation:**
    - ▶ Treatment-Control: treatment = participation in programme
    - ▶ But control group not denied participation; merely delayed
    - ▶ One's place in the queue/pipeline is randomly assigned
    - ▶ Successful applicants randomly assigned to participate either in 2014 or in 2015.
    - ▶ Treatment group participated in 2014; Control group participated in 2015
    - ▶ Control group outcomes measured *before* they embarked on the programme

- **This design mitigates selection bias because:**
    - ▶ Focus is only on *successful* applicants
    - ▶ Randomisation statistically balances outcomes of the participants before entry into the programme. We show this statistically.

Measurement

- **Trust & trustworthiness:**
  - ▶ Trust game
  - ▶ Perceptional responses to survey questions about trust; beliefs

- **Cooperation & altruism:**
  - ▶ Prisoners dilemma game
  - ▶ Public goods game
  - ▶ Dictator game

- **Risk aversion and time discounting:**
  - ▶ Choice between incentivised lotteries (risky versus safe)
  - ▶ Payoff now versus later

- **Mental health and affect:**
  - ▶ Centre for Epidemiological Studies Depression Screen (CES-D 10)
  - ▶ Positive and Negative Affect Schedule - short form (PANAS-SF)

- **Opportunities:**
  - ▶ Survey measures of educational attainment
  - ▶ Employment

- **Public innovation and Connectedness:**
  - ▶ Survey measures of civic engagement
  - ▶ Bargaining experiment
  - ▶ Survey questions on group memberships and "resources"
 - ▶ Social network mapping

Trust Game

- We measure trust through an experiment.
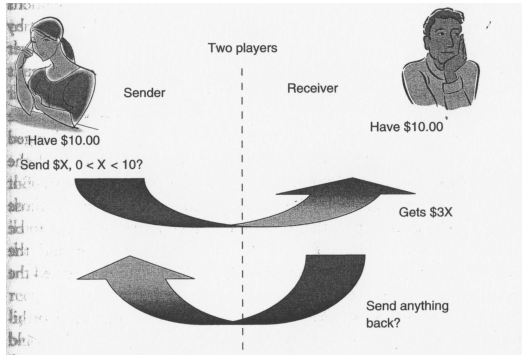
- ▶ Randomly split programme participants into As and Bs (treatment and control)
- ▶ Partners are always non-participants (UCT students)
- ▶ Participants were told they were matched with anon. stranger off site.
- ▶ A and B both possessed the same knowledge of the game.

Trust, Trustworthiness and Depression
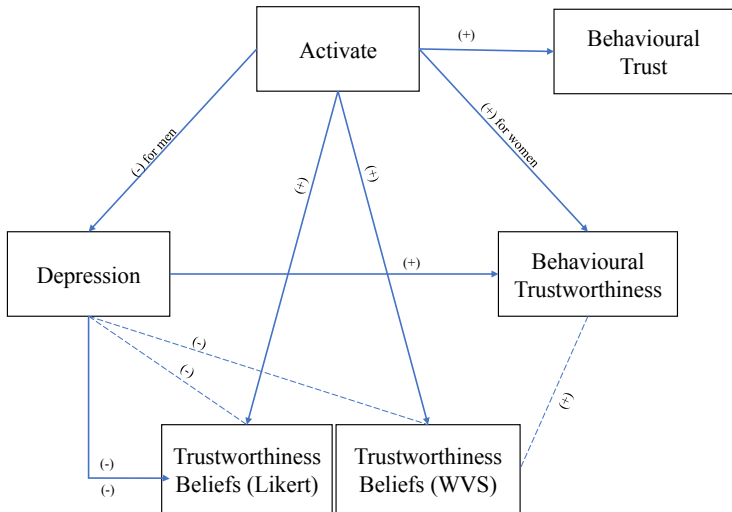
Interpreting the Gendered Impact on Depression

- Detecting depression in men is difficult:
  - ▶ Misdiagnosed as physical illness (Brownhill, Wilhelm, Barclay and Parker 2002).
  - ▶ Hidden as it is in conflict with masculinity (Warren 1983).
  - ▶ Meta analysis by Seidler, Dawes, Rice, Oliffe and Dhillon (2016) shows:
    - ★ Difficulty recognising and communicating symptoms of depression.
    - ★ Action-orientated collaborative approach (group therapy) works better

- "The Mens Stress Workshop": targeted cognitive behavioural therapy for depressed men (Primack, Addis, Syzdek and Miller 2010):
  - ▶ Eight groups sessions of around 1.5hours; focus on understanding one's self better to make better decisions/choices.
  - ▶ Evidence of positive effects for men

- The reduced depression of men has a surprising consequence for trustworthiness: it leads women to become more trustworthy
  - ▶ Evidence that beliefs about trustworthiness affects trust.
  - ▶ Also evidence that mental health affects trustworthiness (Ong, Zaki and Gruber 2017):
    - ★ People with a history of mood disorders (BPI and MDD) shown to be more trustworthy in trust game relative to healthy controls.
  - ▶ In our study, women are more depressed than men, which causes them to be more trustworthy.

Risk Aversion and Time Discounting

- **Main Effects:**
  - ▶ Reduction in risk aversion and time discounting (increase in patience).
  - ▶ Time discounting effects strongest for participants exhibiting responsible sexual behaviours.

- **Decreased risk aversion generates opportunities:**
  - ▶ Decreased risk aversion has an impact on entrepreneurial innovation.
  - ▶ Participants with low labour force attachment prior to the programme (unemployed), become less risk averse after going through the programme.
  - ▶ Their reduced risk aversion leads to a higher probability of taking up self-employment.
  - ▶ Aspects of programme content that resonate with this finding:
    - ★ Sense of self
    - ★ Apirations
    - ★ Creative thinking and collaborative problem solving
    - ★ Project management training
    - ★ Facing fear and failure
    - ★ Ability to communicate powerfully
    - ★ Learning to trust

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