

Rural-Urban Migration and Sexual and Reproductive Health Choices among Street Adolescents and Youth in Uganda

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Thesis summary

While extensive analyses to investigate reasons for and outcomes of rural-urban migration of youth have been undertaken in Uganda, much less attention has been devoted to the nexus of rural-urban migration with, and social determinants of SRH choices of vulnerable populations, especially among street adolescents and youth. This thesis provides the first empirical evidence on the effect of rural-urban migration on, and social determinants of, SRH choices among street adolescents and youth aged 12-24 years in Kampala, Uganda. The studies reported in this thesis aimed to achieve four main goals: 1) to explore the demographic and behavioural drivers of street children and youth's intra-urban mobility; 2) identify pathways driving their risky sexual behaviours within the migration context; 3) assess the determinants of SRH choices among street adolescents and youth, with rural-urban migration as an explanatory factor; and 4) describe the childbearing decision-making, fertility and contraceptive perspectives of street youth and associated socio-demographic factors. The research applied a mixed-methods approach, that employed a semi-structured questionnaire, focus group discussions and in-depth interviews with street adolescents and youth as well as key informant interviews with key stakeholders (government officials, KCCA officials, local healthcare providers and urban leaders). Using the socio-ecological model as the overarching framework, this research reveals stimulating findings as illustrated in Chapters three to five. First, this study demonstrated the important role the migration process, personal physical safety and economic survival play in shaping risky sexual behaviour among migrant street-youth. The studies in this thesis further demonstrated that intra-urban mobility of street adolescents and youth was high and driven by sex (being male), search for casual work, engaging in sex work and a daily income of 1 USD or more as well as the length of stay in the city following migration. Second, the thesis contends that rural-urban migration and intra-urban mobility increased vulnerability to street youth's risky sexual behaviour, especially sex work, and negatively affected utilisation of SRH services (HIV testing, STI screening and family planning) among street youth in significant ways. In particular, the study revealed that SRH services utilisation among migrant street youth in Kampala was generally low and positively associated with older age, knowledge of a place of family planning care and access to SRH information. In-school street adolescents were less likely to use SRH services. The rural-urban migration process was a key barrier to access to SRH services for migrant street adolescents and youth. Fourthly, the thesis findings demonstrate a clear interrelation between childbearing decision-making and contraceptive intentions with intra-urban mobility and migration intentions among street youth.