

Abstract:

A prospective, quasi-experimental study was carried out in Bondo district in western Kenya to determine the potential of schoolchildren as health change agents in a rural community. A group of 40 schoolchildren were given health education using action-oriented and participatory approaches and their knowledge and practices as well as the influence on recipient groups consisting of peers at school and parents/guardians at home, were studied. The study, which used questionnaire surveys, involved a pre-test of knowledge about malaria, diarrhea and hygiene among the recipient groups. After the baseline surveys they underwent health communication training conducted by the 40 schoolchildren. An identical post-test questionnaire was administered to all participants at 4 and 14 months. Health-related practices were studied regularly through observation in schools and homes over 14 months. Significant improvement in knowledge was detected in all recipient groups. Behavioral changes were more evident among the children than among the adults. The impact of the project was reflected in concrete changes in the school environment as well as the home environments. The implications of the findings for health education projects and public health programs are outlined.