



Using social science to maximize the effectiveness of Zika Risk Communication

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Two different types of Risk Communication message

- **Generic:** based on universal biological principles (human and mosquito), can be applied anywhere

- **Context-specific:** to address specific community concerns. Requires some sort of systematic, social science basis

What you need to know about Zika

Messages for pregnant women



Zika virus infection is primarily transmitted to people through the bite of infected Aedes mosquitoes, which also transmit dengue, chikungunya and yellow fever.

Zika virus infection can be transmitted from a pregnant woman to her baby during pregnancy.

Signs and symptoms
Symptoms most commonly include skin rash, fever, conjunctivitis, joint pain and swelling, as well as muscle pain.
Illness lasts 2-7 days.

Treatment
The symptoms of Zika virus infection can be treated with common painkillers and fever medicines, rest and plenty of water.

Potential complications
Pregnant women in general, including those who develop symptoms of Zika virus infection, should see their health care provider for close monitoring and management of their pregnancy.
An unborn baby of infected women may be born with neurological disorder.
An unborn baby of infected women may be born with a small head (microcephaly).
An unborn baby of infected women may die in the womb (fetal death).

Prevention

- Wear light-colored clothes, long sleeves, long trousers or skirts to protect from mosquito bites.
- Use mosquito bed nets, including when sleeping during the day.
- Use mosquito screens on windows and doors.
- Apply mosquito repellent on exposed areas of the body, and even on clothing during the whole pregnancy period.
- Sexual partners, being in or returning from areas where local transmission of Zika virus is known to occur, should practice safer sex or abstinence from sexual activity for at least the whole duration of the pregnancy.






Context-specific messages

- Central importance of these became clear during the West African Ebola outbreak
- Community must be seen as a key **partner** in the disease control process, not as something "to be controlled" from above



3



Need for *empirical understanding* of community perceptions and concerns

- Systematic social science investigations are needed to establish what is going on in a community
 - *National level authorities don't always understand local level issues*
- Without this:
 - Messages may not be understood or accepted, leading to sub-optimal adherence to preventive measures
 - Potential solutions identified within the community may be missed

4





Objective of our study

- ❑ To develop an understanding of the perceptions of and reactions to Zika and Zika messages in two socio-economically and epidemiologically distinct contexts in Brazil

- ❑ To contribute to the development of Zika messages that:
 - Are **properly understood**;
 - Adequately **address population concerns** about the disease;
 - **Can be acted upon** with confidence by people, and in particular by women of reproductive age (= age 18-45 years)

5



Map of Brazil with the two study sites



Methodological approach

Qualitative data

- Database of Zika messages collected from the two sites
- Focus Group Discussions (Women of reproductive age)
- One-to-One Interviews (Male partners, health workers, religious leaders, message developers etc)
 - 8 FGDs and 32 Interviews in each site

Asking about

- Awareness of and practices relating to *Aedes* preventive activities
- Knowledge of and concerns about Zika and Zika messages
- Views on delaying pregnancy, practicing safer sex, and abortion in relation to Zika

7



Study team



8



Zika Risk Communication in Brazil

Mosquito control:
for all *Aedes Aegypti*-borne diseases. 'Low hanging fruit', but still needs to be locally relevant



Zika Prevention

Sexual Transmission
(much more difficult)



Mosquito control (Generic, not Zika-specific)

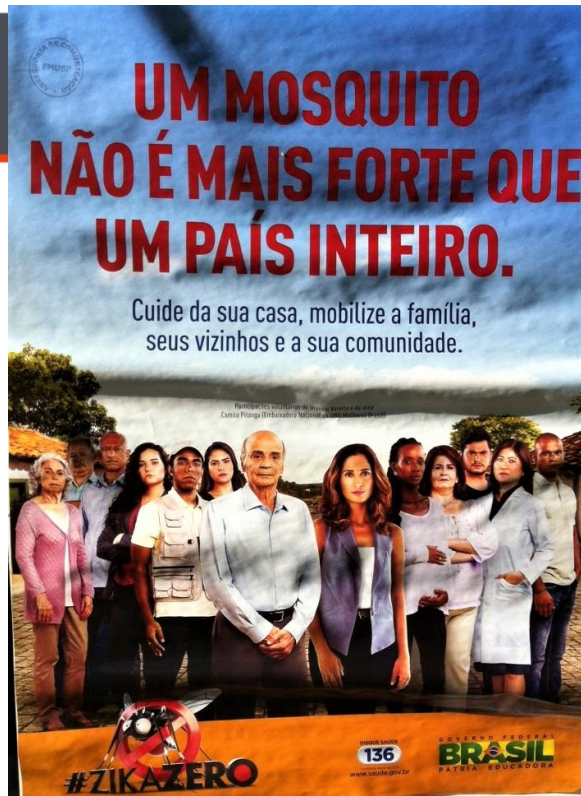
ALL TOGETHER AGAINST AEDES AEGYPTI - STAY INFORMED!

AEDES AEGYPTI: why should we worry?

- ✓ *Aedes aegypti* transmits dengue, chikungunya and zika virus
- ✓ During the summer heat, the mosquito breeds faster
- ✓ It is not easy to notice the bite of the mosquito, because it does not hurt, nor does it itch
- ✓ The mosquito eggs survive for months in dry places, before entering the water and becoming larvae

- SIMPLE ATTITUDES HELP ELIMINATE BREEDING SITES
- It is important to keep water containers tightly closed, and to clean them regularly





- **A MOSQUITO IS NOT STRONGER THAN AN ENTIRE COUNTRY**
- *Take care of your home, mobilize your family, your neighbours and your community*
- **#ZIKAZERO**

Actionable?



- Destroy mosquito breeding sites and protect yourself against Dengue, Zika and Chikungunya
- Eliminate standing water and cover water containers, tanks and vats

Addressing my concerns?





Almost nothing about sexual transmission...

- *"About that we hear very little. Very, very little."* [Female Nurse, 32 years]
- *"In daily life, I've never heard anyone make any comment about it"* [Female nutritionist, 42 years]

Is Zika an
STD?

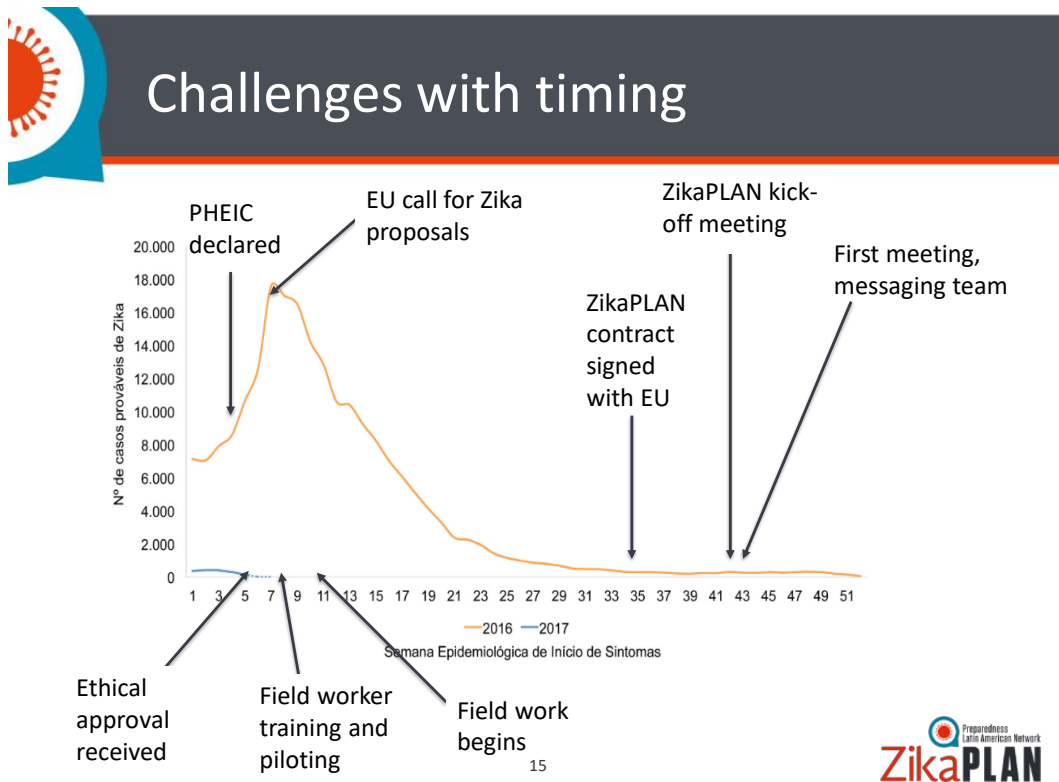
13



So how to develop prevention messages for men?

- *"I think that safe sex should be something cool, you know? Let's do safe sex because the benefits are undeniable, okay? And then, this piggybacks the Zika wave"* [Male psychologist, 45 years]
- Several references to **machismo** in the interviews: suggestion to package the safe sex message in relation to masculinity
- To do this, we need to have a rich, local understanding of masculinity:
 - What makes safe sex 'cool' in this context ?

14



Two major lessons learned

- **Lesson Number 1:** Risk communication efforts should go beyond the 'low hanging fruit', and tackle the more challenging but critically important culturally determined issues
 - For this, an empirical understanding of community perceptions and concerns is needed, based on context-specific social science research
 - The community is a core resource in any efforts to address any infectious disease outbreak, and should be seen as a *partner* in the process



• **Lesson Number 2:**

- Doing this sort of research can be time-consuming
- It needs to be planned *before an outbreak* so operations can start immediately when needed
- Qualified social scientists should be identified and retained *in advance* of any event
- Contracts and ethical clearance must be arranged *prior to an outbreak* to facilitate rapid action
- Funds should be prioritised for this at national level, as a potentially highly cost-effective preparedness measure