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Ada González-Torres - Local Media and the Spread of Ebola: Evidence from Guinea

This paper studies the role of local media in halting the spread of a major epidemic in the context of the Ebola outbreak in Guinea in 2014-16. Using original data from Guinea and a quasi-experimental design based on exogenous variation in radio signal reception by distinct media outlets, combined with the precise timing of distinct information campaigns about Ebola, we study the effect of local radios on the spread of the disease, social resistance and treatment uptake.

We conjecture that local media serves as a coordination device to change cultural practices that facilitate the spread of disease, through its effect on second order beliefs. The results show that sustained access to a local radio program informing about protective measures, encouraging treatment, addressing Ebola rumors and new burial practices, lowered social resistance behavior, increased treatment uptake and led to a drop in infected cases seven months after the start of the campaign. We calculate that around 303 Ebola infections could have been spared if all areas with access to a rural radio station had their own local radio, that is 8% of the total number of Ebola cases. Access to local radios affected cultural norms, such as burial practices, and facilitated technological adoption, but there is no evidence of impacts on private actions, such as chlorine use.