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Community's perceived impact of a South African combination HIV prevention intervention on the lives of intervention recipients: Findings from the HERStory qualitative evaluation

Authors: Kealeboga Maruping^{1,2}, Zoe Duby^{1,3}, Kim Jonas^{1,2}, Tracy McClinton Appollis^{1,2}, Caroline Kuo⁴, Catherine Mathews^{1,2}

Affiliation:

1. Health Systems Research Unit, South African Medical Research Council
2. Adolescent Health Research Unit, Division of Child and Adolescent Health, University of Cape Town
3. Division of Social and Behavioural Sciences in the School of Public Health and Family Medicine, University of Cape Town
4. Department of Behavioral and Social Sciences, Browns University School of Public Health

Study objectives:

Adolescent girls and young women (AGYW) in South Africa are at high risk of being infected with HIV and having unplanned pregnancies. People such as parents, community leaders, teachers and peer facilitators form an important part of the social environments of AGYW. For interventions targeting AGYW to be successful, the engagement and positive involvement of people in the social environment and community networks surrounding AGYW is vital. The perceptions of community members towards such interventions play a role in the participation and retention of AGYW in programmes, and are vital in the successful implementation of an HIV prevention intervention programme aimed at AGYW. The HERStory study is an evaluation of a combination HIV prevention programme for AGYW in ten South African Districts. The qualitative component of the study explored the perceptions of the impact of the various programmes on the lives of AGYW in 5 districts in South Africa. This paper aims to highlight how the AGYW's community network perceived the impact of the intervention programmes on the lives of AGYW.

Methods:

We present the findings from qualitative evaluation research comprising of 23 in-depth interviews (IDIs) and 5 focus group discussions (FGDs) with parents of AGYW, community leaders, teachers, male peers and partners and programme peer facilitators in five South African districts. IDIs and FGDs followed semi-structured interview guides conducted in the predominant language of the participants in each district. Participants were purposively sampled from the communities and schools of intervention

recipients. Interviews were audio recorded, transcribed, translated and coded using NVivo 12 software together with interpretation being conducted by an analysis team.

Results:

Members of the AGYW intervention recipients' communities discussed issues relating to the need for such HIV prevention programmes and the importance of educating AGYW on sexual reproductive health (SRH) matters in order to prevent them from "making mistakes", such as falling pregnant. Peer facilitators reported that AGYW benefitted from the programmes as they lacked knowledge about SRH (contraceptive use). Perceptions of positive behaviour changes such as improved self-confidence observed by teachers, peer facilitators and parents were reported to be a result of participation in the programmes. The teachers and peer facilitators of AGYW reported that AGYW sometimes used learning sessions as a group support platform to discuss issues and advise one another. Community leaders blamed the community network for normalising "bad" behaviour such as gender-based violence and problems of access to health care were attributed to a lack of adolescent and youth friendly facilities.

Conclusion:

The support of the community network plays a role in the uptake and retention of such HIV prevention programmes amongst AGYW. Support from the community allows AGYW to learn and engage more when it comes to issues of SRH which are beneficial to them. Some suggestions were made to include programmes for young men and to include educating the parents of AGYW on SRH to foster better communication between them.