

ADOLESCENT GIRLS' AND YOUNG WOMEN'S PERSPECTIVES ON THE EFFECTS OF PARTICIPATING IN A SOUTH AFRICAN COMBINATION HIV PREVENTION INTERVENTION FUNDED BY THE GLOBAL FUND

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BACKGROUND:

The perceptions and experiences of intervention recipients are important in impact evaluations. A combination HIV-prevention intervention for Adolescent Girls and Young Women (AGYW), funded by the Global Fund, was implemented 2016–2019 in ten districts in South Africa. The intervention offered a comprehensive package of health, education, and support services for AGYW. The HERStory study, an impact evaluation of the intervention, included a qualitative component which provided in-depth insight into the experiences and perceptions of AGYW.

METHODS:

We conducted 19 focus group discussions (FGDs), and 57 in-depth interviews (IDIs) with AGYW aged 15–24 years who had participated in any of the intervention components in five of the districts: Western Cape (WC), Eastern Cape (EC), North West (NW), Mpumalanga (MPU), and KwaZulu Natal (KZN). IDIs and FGDs followed semi-structured interview guides, were conducted in the predominant languages spoken in each district, and explored AGYW's narratives of the interventions' effects on their lives. Audio-recordings were transcribed verbatim and translated into English. Qualitative data was analysed thematically, coded using Nvivo 12 software, and interpreted by an analysis team.

FINDINGS:

One predominant theme to emerge in the qualitative data related to AGYW's views on how and why the intervention was impactful for preventive behaviour changes. AGYW felt that through participating in intervention components such as Keeping Girls in School, RISE clubs and Teen Parenting programmes, they learned self-respect, improving self-esteem and self-worth. They expressed enhanced emotional coping strategies and improved communication with parents/caregivers, improvements in sexual and reproductive health knowledge, and increased prioritisation of education over romantic relationships.

CONCLUSIONS:

Our findings demonstrate that intervention recipients perceived positive impacts on their lives as a result of participating in the intervention. The perspectives of AGYW are valuable for understanding the perceived benefits of the intervention, and its effects on the lived realities, self-reported behaviour, well-being, and behavioural choices around HIV prevention of intended beneficiaries.

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We were taught to have goals in life and objectives (WC)

This programme did change our lives (KZN)

What I like about these programmes, they help you in making choices, because in life we have to make difficult choices (WC)

The programme helped my self-esteem (MPU)

Being part of this group... has helped me with a lot of things... like peer pressure... (before) I was being pushed by peer pressure... my marks started to drop and now I see that they're increasing... They wanted me to date people I didn't want to date. They also wanted to know why I wasn't giving my boyfriend a baby, and I'm not ready for those things of having children. I told them that I don't want to be part of their little group anymore because they make me make mistakes. (NW)

I see myself as someone different (after being part of the programme) because peer pressure would pull me in every time... where ever they went I would follow them, I wouldn't do anything different, I was like a tail. And it changed me in that, I believe that if I hadn't been part of this programme I would have a child... (NW)

Now I see myself as a higher standard and I respect myself. (EC)

I see myself as someone who is different now... I used to hang out with people who aren't good... they used to pressurise me to do things that are wrong.... But since I joined the group, I'm not with them anymore (NW)

This thing of dodging school and drug use and peer pressure... the awareness we got from Keeping Girls in School about these things kind helps us to check what is right and what is wrong. (EC)

I had many friends and they were involved in drugs... I learned from RISE about how to deal with substances and pressure and I decided to stop going with these friends and associated myself with those who were not on drugs. (EC)