

Stepping Stones and Creating Futures

Preliminary outcomes of a behavioural and structural pilot intervention for young people in urban informal settlements in South Africa - January 2013

Preventing the heterosexual transmission of HIV amongst young women and men remains a critical global health priority. While globally the HIV epidemic has stabilised and in places declined, in 2009 UNICEF estimated young people aged 15-24 accounted for 41% of all new HIV acquisitions in those over 15, of which 79% were in Sub-Saharan Africa (UNICEF, 2011).

Informal settlements in South Africa and globally remain the epicentre of the HIV epidemic, with sustained high incidence among youth despite HIV prevention efforts and bio-medical interventions (Shisana, Rehle, Simbayi, & Zuma, 2009; Thomas, Vearey, & Mahlangu, 2011; van Renterghem & Jackson, 2009). In South Africa 29.1% of the total estimated HIV incidence was found in urban informal settlements, even though only 8.7% of South Africans older than two years live here (Rehle et al., 2007).

In women, HIV risk is inexorably linked to women's experience of gender subordination including social and economic dependency on men. A cohort study of young South African women showed a significant proportion of HIV in women could be prevented if relationship power inequity were reduced and there were no severe physical or sexual violence (R. K. Jewkes, Dunkle, Nduna, & Shai, 2010). One of the important causes of dependency in women is financial dependency, which reduces women's ability to resist men's control. In addition, women's engagement in transactional relationships was estimated to increase HIV incidence by 2.3 times in the cohort analysis (R. Jewkes, Dunkle, Nduna, & Jama, 2012).

In men, arguments have been advanced that prevailing constructions of masculinity that link dominance over and control of women to the glorification of sexual risk-

taking behaviours, particularly having many partners and not using condoms, are a response for many men to weak economic contexts (Hunter, 2010; R. Jewkes & Morrell, 2010). Tackling the intersections of gender inequalities and poverty are therefore a critical focus of HIV prevention programmes, particularly in informal settlements where these dynamics are magnified (Gibbs, Willan, Misselhorn, & Mangoma, 2012; Gupta, Ogden, & Warner, 2011; Hunter, 2010).

This brief presents preliminary results of an ongoing evaluation of the Stepping Stones and Creating Futures intervention, a combined structural and behavioural intervention designed to address the above factors. The intervention aims to reduce HIV risk behaviours and violence in urban informal settlements through strengthening young people's livelihoods and building more gender equitable relationships.

The project is a joint initiative of three partners: the Health Economics and HIV and AIDS Research Division (HEARD) at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN), the Gender and Health Unit of the South African Medical Research Council (MRC) and Project Empower.

Stepping Stones and Creating Futures

Stepping Stones – South African Edition (adapted from Stepping Stones (Welbourn, 1995)) is a behavioural intervention that combines HIV prevention with the pursuit of greater gender equity through participatory activities and reflection. A two year evaluation in the Eastern Cape, South Africa showed it was effective in reducing HSV2 incidence by 33% in men and women,

STEPPING STONES

Creating

Futures

and reduced a number of reported risk behaviours in men, with a lower proportion of men reporting perpetration of intimate partner violence across two years of follow-up and less transactional sex and problem drinking at 12 months as well as improved mental health for men (R. Jewkes et al., 2008).

Creating Futures is a structural intervention that was jointly created by the three partner organisations. It seeks to encourage reflection and action among young people on their livelihoods through participatory activities, which will strengthen young people's livelihoods and economic power. The combined intervention is 20 sessions of three hours, delivered by trained peer facilitators.

Stepping Stones and Creating Futures was piloted in urban informal settlements in Durban, South Africa with 233 young people (110 men, 123 women) with an average age of 21.7 years. The study design was an interrupted time-series design, with follow-ups three and nine months post-intervention. Quantitative and qualitative data was collected. The study was approved by UKZN's Human and Social Sciences Ethics Committee and the MRC's Ethics Committee.

Young people's lives

Young people were recruited into the project through community networks. All came from two urban informal settlements. The study participants had an average age of 21.7 years. While the majority reported having a partner, only 15% of men and 8% of women lived with their partner. Two-thirds of women had given birth to a child, compared to one third of men who had fathered a child.

Young men and women in the sample rarely worked. Only 55% of men and 29% of women reported working or earning in the past 12 months. Men also reported higher rates of work seeking behaviour – such as looking for jobs in a newspaper and developing ideas for making or selling products, compared to women. This lack of work was particularly challenging for young people who felt they should be starting to create a life for themselves:

Mthobisi (male)¹: I am not working and in my community there is that perception that when you are not working you don't have money you see what I mean, people say he is not working and he is a child people say he is a child if not working...

This lack of employment meant that many went hungry; 25% of men and women said they went hungry either every day or every week and 34% of men and 47% of

women reported they had stolen in the past month because they were hungry.

Only 45% of men and 24% of women had finished high school.

Relationships between men and women in this group were fraught. Men and women reported rates of intimate partner violence (physical and sexual) in the past 12 months of 40%, compared to a national average of 13%. Among men, condom use at last sex was relatively high at 70%, but among women it was lower at 56%.

Preliminary findings from the pilot study

Preliminary quantitative and qualitative findings from participants three months post-intervention are encouraging with positive changes in a range of measures around livelihoods and gender relations. In total 221 participants (95%) were re-interviewed for this round. However, the data presented is provisional, with final data collection still to happen in May 2013. As such, data needs cautious interpretation.

Despite the highly mobile nature of participants and the difficulties of implementing and evaluating interventions in informal settlements, the intervention was delivered effectively and well received by participants:

Male participant - focus group: I just loved being at the intervention [everyone laughs]. No like seriously guys I enjoyed being at the intervention, this is where I got my mind to be busy, because I would be with other people where I had my mind opened to other things and was able to see life in a different perspective...

Livelihood measures improved for women and men, including job seeking, income earned and savings. Women reported looking for jobs in newspapers more in the past three months, from 45% to 66%. 20% more women reported earning money through selling something they had made in the past three months. Overall, men and women reported higher rates of work in the past 12 months and mean earnings in the past month for men and women increased between baseline and 3 month follow-up for men from R411 to R713 (a 73% increase) and in women R174 to R255 (a 47% increase).

Moreover, participants reported being better able to negotiate the work environment:

Mandla (male): Before I used to do things recklessly, drink alcohol and come back home around 12am or 1am while I would be going to work that morning, and I would go to work and

¹ All names are pseudonyms



get warnings, but Project Empower showed me how to do things.

Social grants are a critical security net provided by the South African state – which young men and women tend not to access (Makiwane & Udjo, 2006). Access to social grants increased for both men and women at follow up, with men reporting an 85% increase from 9.4% to 17.4%.

Participants also reported saving more and linked this into budgeting and articulating a goal in life – a key focus of Creating Futures:

Male participant – focus group: What I have learnt is to stick to my budget and also make a list and stick to those things that are in the list and not spend money on unimportant things.

For many young people, especially men, crime is one of the few ways in which they can secure a livelihood. Qualitative data supported quantitative data that showed male participation in crime in the past three months had declined at the follow up.

Data also points to a range of positive outcomes in terms of gender and HIV. Men and women reported greater critical thinking about gender relationships and recognised the central role of power in these:

Interviewer: According to you, what makes a good woman?
Nomzamo (female): Women who would be independent, they would not expect to be controlled by men, firstly. They would not allow a man to control them. They must know that they also have rights and have to fight for them. She must work for herself and not expect to be given things

Critical thinking about gender relationships is a precondition for acting in new ways.

Across qualitative and quantitative data at three months participants reported an increasing focus on their main sexual partner. This included improved communication and a renewed focus on building lives together and, for men, being an involved father:

Interviewer: Let's talk about the experience you had with the programme, like what made you get involved with the project?
Mandla (male): This programme has helped me a lot like workwise I'm holding on to it, and the person I am dating I have committed myself to her and other things are progressing and my child is growing well.

Among men there was also an increase in the number reporting that the person they had last had sex with was their main partner; from 50% at baseline to 62% at follow up, a 23% increase. The strengthening of main

relationships is suggestive of potential reductions in concurrent partnerships.

Closely linked to a renewed focus on main partners men reporting that they had less transactional sex. At baseline 24% reported having had transactional sex in the last three months and at follow up this was down to 18% (a 23% decline).

Amongst women, while we did not see a decline in women reporting having had transactional sex at this point – a finding similar to Stepping Stones which only saw a decline in women's participation in transactional sex at two years (R. Jewkes, et al., 2008) – fewer reported that the last time they received something for sex the act would not have occurred without the financial reward (from 71.5% to 55.2%).

Male and female participants also reported healthier use of substances such as alcohol and drugs:

Interviewer: What is it you have learned from the programme that you applied and you found to be successful?
Vusi (Male): You see we sit down [my girlfriend and I] and discuss things together, like maybe let's for an example like when I used to drink... Interviewer: So have you stopped drinking?
Vusi: Yes.
Interviewer: Or you have taken a break?
Vusi: No I have stopped, but they [friends] try to get me to drink again but they never are successful at it (laughing) no they fail!

Furthermore, arguing with a partner about alcohol use in the past three months also declined among men and women. Women also reported a 55% decline in drug use at the three month follow up.

Data also suggests that there was an important impact on men's mental health. Men's reported severe depression declined from 50% at baseline to 37% at follow up, a 26% decline, and men's suicidal thoughts in the past four weeks also declined by 28% post-intervention. This impact was only seen among men and reflects Stepping Stones findings (R. Jewkes, et al., 2008).



Relationships

GENDER

Health

Learn

EQUALITY



In summary

Preliminary outcome results three months after the intervention are highly promising:

1. Women searched for and attempted livelihood activities at a greater rate than at baseline;
2. Men and women's levels of work and earnings increased;
3. Increased access to social grants for men and women;
4. There was an increased focus from men and women on their main sexual partner, with a 23% reduction in transactional sex in the past three months for men;
5. Men's mental health improved.

These changes suggest that livelihoods and gender relations are changing in a range of positive directions and they parallel the findings seen in the large Stepping Stones RCT evaluation in the Eastern Cape. However, they need to be interpreted cautiously and we cannot fully assess the impact of the intervention until the 12 month follow up is complete.

If the combined Stepping Stones and Creating Futures intervention continues to show positive trends around outcomes, our team is looking to expand the work in two major ways.

First, recognising the need for rigorously evaluated interventions, we would seek funding to undertake a randomised control trial of this combined intervention to fully assess whether it is an efficacious intervention or not at reducing intimate partner violence and HIV risk. Building an evidence base on what works for women and girls remains a key priority.

Second, while this intervention was developed for and piloted in South Africa, it was designed for regional applicability. Urban informal settlements are growing regionally and we are exploring approaches to contextualise these two interventions and pilot them in a variety of settings to further develop a body of work around how we can effectively tackle gender inequalities and livelihood insecurities simultaneously to reduce HIV.

The project team

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Norad

