

FACTORS THAT CONTRIBUTE TO HIGH HIV INCIDENCE AMONG ADOLESCENT GIRLS AND YOUNG WOMEN IN ZIMBABWE: THE CASE OF MATABELELAND SOUTH

RECOMMENDATION REPORT



Acronyms

AGYW	Adolescent Girls and Young Women
CAMFED	Campaign for Female Education
CAPI	Computer-Assisted Personal Interview
CBOs	Community-based Organisations
CDC	Centres for Disease Control and Prevention
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
CSOs	Civil Society Organizations
DREAMS	Determined, Resilient, Empowered, AIDS-free, Mentored, and Safev
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
KII	Key Informant Interview
MRCZ	Medical Research Council of Zimbabwe
NAC	National Aids Council
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organisations
OPHID	Organisation for Public Health Interventions and Development
RDC	Rural District Council
SPSS	Statistical Package for the Social Sciences
SRH	Sexual and Reproductive Health
UNAIDS	Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS
ZIMPHIA	Zimbabwe Population-based HIV Impact Assessment
ZIMRA	Zimbabwe Revenue Authority

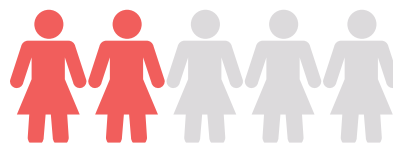
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1. Introduction

UN Women commissioned a study on factors that contribute to high HIV incidence among adolescent girls and young women (AGYW) in Zimbabwe, with a particular focus on Matabeleland South. The purpose of this report is to propose recommendations that could be used to address these factors. The report presents the problem statement, the background of the problem and the proposed recommendations.



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Adolescent Girls Young Women

Both were far higher than the national incidence rate for the same year – **0.2 for adolescent girls and 0.3 for young women.**

The seven Matabeleland South districts (Gwanda, Insiza, Beitbridge, Matobo, Bulilima, Mangwe and Umzingwane) have their unique drivers of HIV infections, including among AGYW.

The factors contributing to the high HIV incidence among AGYW in Matabeleland South are:

- Limited HIV information and knowledge
- Non and inconsistent use of condoms
- Non-disclosure of HIV status
- Sex work, transactional and intergenerational sex
- Gender inequality
- Barriers to accessing HIV prevention, testing and treatment services
- Negative role models
- Drug and substance abuse
- Limited economic empowerment
- Concurrent multiple sexual partners

Addressing these multifaceted issues is imperative to mitigate the adverse health impacts, socioeconomic disparities, and systemic barriers that perpetuate the high rates of HIV infection among AGYW in Matabeleland South. The following section presents the proposed recommendations for addressing the factors contributing to high HIV incidence among AGYW in Matabeleland South.

2. Problem Statement

2.1 The Problem



Despite efforts to reduce HIV incidence in Zimbabwe, Matabeleland South continues to maintain the highest HIV incidence among AGYW across all the 10 provinces of Zimbabwe.

2.2 Background of the Problem



22.3%

Matabeleland South remains the hotspot for HIV and AIDS after recording the highest HIV prevalence rate in 2020.



Matabeleland South province shares borders with South Africa and Botswana, with Beitbridge and Plumtree as entry points into the two countries, respectively.



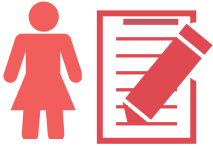
In 2011, the HIV incidence rate for Matabeleland South was **0.88 per cent**, which was high and reduced to **0.33 per cent** in 2022.

Despite existing prevention efforts, the AGYW continue to experience disproportionately high rates of new HIV infections.

For the year 2023, the HIV incidence rate in Matabeleland South was as follows:

¹UNICEF. "Social and Behaviour Change." Accessed? <https://www.unicef.org/social-and-behaviour-change>.

2.3 HIV Information and Knowledge



2.3.1 Option 1: Provide a mix of edutainment, including working with influential artists, to impart HIV information to young people

Edutainment is grounded in the social learning theory, which posits that observing, modelling, and imitating the behaviors, attitudes, and emotional reactions of others can influence human learning and behavior.¹ Edutainment makes it easy to tackle complex social issues with simple language, integrated into various entertainment formats, and it can bring about change in contexts where traditional strategies and actions may prove unsuccessful.

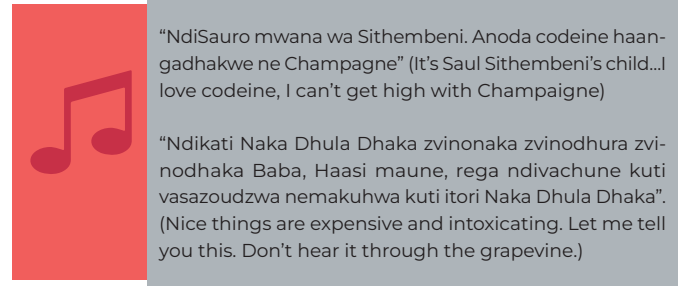
The use of edutainment is not new in Zimbabwe and did yield positive results in five provinces, for example, when Grassroot Soccer was able to reach approximately **30,000 adolescents** and young adults with life-saving SRH information across Harare, Bulawayo, Midlands, Matabeleland North and South each year.

Over 55 per cent of these were adolescent girls and young women (AGYW) 10-24 years olds.²

However, edutainment, especially the use of musicians for HIV prevention and behavior change, was found not to be common in Matabeleland South. Edutainment needs to be strengthened in Matabeleland South for behavior change and a reduction in HIV incidence among AGYW.

Considering that traditional interventions, such as the use of community cadres to impart HIV information to small groups of AGYWs has limited reach, there is minimal progress in reducing HIV incidence among AGYW in Matabeleland South province. A focus on edutainment could be an option, especially since study findings revealed idleness and lack of entertainment are major challenges for young people in the province. Their form of entertainment is parties where secular music that supports unhealthy and at-risk lifestyles is played. Lyrics for some of the popular songs encourage drug and substance

abuse. For example, some artists perform songs that glorify “musombodhiya” – a street language used to refer to an illicit alcohol brew composed of diluted ethanol or methanol. Zim dancehall music has become a powerful medium of expression but has been accused of influencing vices among young people, notably drug and substance abuse.³ Below are some examples of the lyrics:



Since AGYW and their male counterparts view artists as their role models that can influence their behavior, working closely with the local artists and DJs in producing and playing HIV theme songs that impart correct information and lead to healthy lifestyles could be revolutionary. Sports tournaments in Matabeleland South province was reported to have become the playground for unhealthy sexual activities. Although themed sports tournaments were previously reported to be effective, the moral decay of adolescents and youth from music and social media might render this strategy ineffective. However, if well organised and monitored, these sports tournaments could be centres for HIV information dissemination and service provision, with artists playing HIV theme songs, short HIV videos, and community dramas, all providing entertainment infused with HIV informational messages. It is through influential artists delivering positive HIV prevention, testing, and treatment messages in contemporary music that resonates with the younger generations that impact may be achieved. A good example is the PSH love shouldn’t hurt campaign, which brought together popular artists who produced contemporary music that not only captured the hearts of many people but also had an impact on public response to the fight against GBV.

²Grassroot soccer Annual Report. 2019.

³NewsHawk. 2021. “Zimdancehall ‘drugs-music’ Nexus Affects Youths.” Accessed? <https://thenewshawks.com/zimdancehall-drugs-music-nexus-affects-youths/>

01

One of the advantages of edutainment is that it can reach populations with low levels of literacy and hard-to-reach populations, such as the remote parts of Mangwe.



02

Edutainment can tackle deeply rooted social norms, gender inequality, myths and misconceptions, all of which exacerbate HIV infections.



Advantages of Edutainment



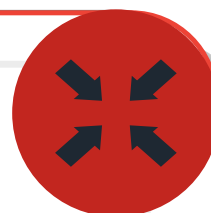
Edutainment can also be an effective vehicle for reaching wider sectors of society since it can be tailored towards specific groups, particularly for reaching underserved communities and groups reluctant to modify behaviors.

03



It tackles complex social issues with simple language, integrated into various entertainment formats, and can bring about change in contexts where traditional strategies and actions have not yielded positive results.

04



To effectively implement this recommendation, Government Ministries such as the Ministry of Youth, Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education (MOPSE) and MOHCC, as well as NGOs and CSOs working with adolescents and youth, should partner with artists that include musicians and drama groups in the use of edutainment for behavior change.

2.3.2 Option 2: Strengthen the provision of comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) to adolescents and youth and provide accurate, comprehensive information, challenge misconceptions, and promote responsible behavior

Comprehensive sexuality education equips children and young people with the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values that help them to protect their sexual health, develop respectful social and sexual relationships, make responsible choices and understand and protect the rights of others.

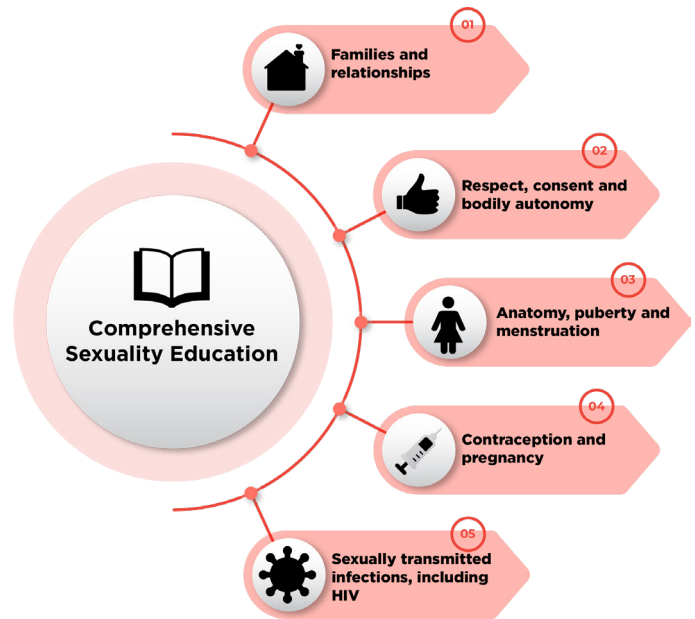
The provision of comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) gives young people accurate, age-appropriate information about sexuality and their sexual and reproductive health, which is critical for their health and survival.

By increasing awareness and understanding of the risks associated with unprotected sex, it is possible to empower adolescents and young people to make informed decisions and take proactive steps to protect their sexual health.

CSE should be based on an established curriculum guide that was developed by UNESCO, UNFPA, UNICEF, UN Women, UNAIDS and WHO and is scientifically accurate, tailored for different ages and comprehensive, covering a range of topics on sexuality and sexual and reproductive health, throughout childhood, adolescence and young adulthood.

The provision of CSE is not a new recommendation, given that CSE is taught in schools and provided to out of school youth through NGOs in Zimbabwe. However, the prevalence of unhealthy sexual practices resulting in high teenage pregnancy as well as adolescent sex work, multiple sexual partners and the high HIV incidence rate in Matabeleland South is an indication of the need to strengthen CSE both in and out of school. The term CSE was found to be

used loosely, making it lose its comprehensiveness. A study on Gender, Culture and Sexuality Education in Zimbabwe revealed that some teachers in Zimbabwe do not feel comfortable teaching certain aspects of the CSE curriculum as comprehensively as they are expected to, with some of them fearing a backlash from those parents who regard CSE as an encouragement of sexual activity, a direct violation of their societal norms and values.⁴ Parents and guardians need to be engaged in CSE to clearly understand and appreciate CSE and its benefits. Topics covered by CSE include but are not limited to:



HIV and AIDS education should be imparted as an integrated component of SRH. Given that patriarchy and negative masculinity were reported to be characteristics in Matabeleland South, comprehensive sexuality education would be an effective means to address systems of patriarchal domination and toxic masculinity by changing social and cultural patterns of behavior that tend to perpetuate HIV stigma and discrimination, as well as violence against women and girls.

The MOPSE need to push implementation of the school-based CSE, ensuring that schools work closely with School Develop Committees for effective implementation of in-school CSE, backed up by close monitoring of teachers' CSE lessons. In contrast, NGOs and CSOs work closely with community leaders, parents, and guardians to implement out-of-school CSE effectively.

⁴Vimbai Matswetu et al. 2023. "Teaching Danger and Silencing Desire: Gender, Culture and Sexuality Education in Zimbabwe."

2.4 Poverty and Limited Economic Empowerment



2.4.1 Option 1: Provide vocational skills training opportunities to adolescent girls and young women in Matabeleland South to increase their earning potential and overall economic independence

While a variety of SRH and HIV programs in Matabeleland South have made significant strides in educating and empowering young women to negotiate for safe sex, including through encouraging consistent use of condoms, the gendered economic inequalities and power imbalances within the rural and urban communities of Matabeleland South, that favor men, hinder further advancement towards positive behavioral change for HIV prevention.

Therefore, providing vocational training can help individuals develop in-demand skills such as, agriculture, carpentry, tailoring, hair and cosmetics, which can increase their independent earning potential. Vocational skills training programs are widely implemented in Zimbabwe, including in Matabeleland South, through vocational training centres such as Pangani, Avoca, Esigodini and Guyu. However, related interventions specifically targeting AGYW in Matabeleland South are limited, and AGYW needs strengthened access to vocational skills training programs. The value of vocational skills training programs also stems from the research findings that highlight previous efforts to engage adolescents and youth, including sex workers, in income-generating activities and VSLA groups, which were unsuccessful due to the high mobility within and across borders.

Various vocational skills options will also ensure strategic market viability and positioning for each AGYW. Being a relatively mobile population, providing AGYW with vocational skills training allows for sustainable and long-term results that benefit beneficiaries regardless of immigration status. Vocational skills training can also be strengthened by providing short-term work placements to enable hands-on learning and experience, increasing their employability or entrepreneurial prospects upon graduating from the training program. In implementing vocational skills training programs in the

province, key stakeholders such as Vocational training centers, MoPSE and the Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education would be pivotal. Overall, vocational skills training opens an economic avenue that may potentially see a decrease in AGYWs reliance on transactional sex or sex work.

2.4.2 Option 2: Design family level income generating activities to boost parents' financial capacity to provide holistic care for their children and youth

The study cited poverty as a major driver for AGYW falling into transactional sex and sex work, as well as a key push factor for parents sending their daughters off into early and/or child marriages. Designing family level income generating activities increases household income through livelihood diversification and inherently curbs the likelihood of AGYW engaging in risky sex for financial gain. By generating income, families can meet basic needs, such as food, shelter, education and sanitary wear. Income generating activities have been commonly implemented in Zimbabwe, including by partners, such as Care International and the World Bank, who piloted the **“Social Protection and WASH Interventions to Keep Adolescent Girls in School”** project that yielded positive results despite the short implementation period.

While gender dynamics have been known to topple the benefits of IGAs, including through increased gender-based violence against women who become more financially independent than their husbands, delivering IGAs at the family level may be essential in ensuring financial gain where all members of a family contribute to the establishment and running of an IGA. IGAs challenge traditional gender roles and enable women to break free from the confines of being solely homemakers. Women's participation in household level IGAs is essential for gender equality and empowerment as it allows women to contribute economically, gain skills, and contribute to household decisions. Although so, basic financial literacy and business management training would be required for better management of income and expenditure at the household level. The skills acquired through engaging in IGAs can also lead to improved employability, self-reliance, and long-term economic growth – benefits that can be pivotal for individual and family growth. Where these family level IGAs are well established, the possibility of sustaining benefits well into the future is greater.


Key stakeholders involved in delivering family level IGAs in the province could be the Ministry of Gender and the Ministry of Youth, as well as traditional and community leaders who can be instrumental in driving the agenda. Therefore, IGAs would not only have financial gains but will be instrumental in fostering independence that may discourage AGYW from transactional sex and sex work.

2.4.3 Option 3: Establish Social Safety Nets for AGYW from underprivileged families through the provision of conditional cash transfers, which can be instrumental in helping AGYW meet their basic needs and reduce their reliance on child or early marriage, transactional sex and/or sex work

Although transactional sex can be considered a risk-coping mechanism, it is also a leading contributor to widespread HIV transmission.⁵

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The study found that economic pressures at home may push parents into marrying off their daughters before they reach



18 years

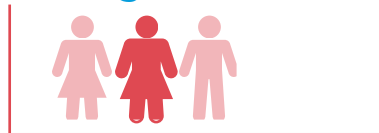
to relieve the perceived economic burden of raising and educating them.

.....

Providing conditional cash transfers to AGYW reduces their economic vulnerability. Designed primarily to alleviate economic hardship, cash transfers allow for vulnerable populations, such as AGYW from underprivileged families or child-headed families, to gain much needed financial support. To qualify for a cash transfer disbursement, beneficiaries can be given targets around safer sexual practices, such as a number of SRHR related visits to a local health facility or testing negative for sexually transmitted infections (STIs). This can be done through collaborating with HIV testing facilities, such as the New Start Centre and Population Services Zimbabwe, as well as the MOHCC to track AGYW health seeking behavior. In so doing, risky sexual engagements by beneficiaries may be reduced. In Zimbabwe,

the **Harmonized Social Cash Transfer (HSCT)** program aims to raise the dignity of vulnerable groups, including sex workers, by promoting resilience and well-being and contributing to social protection through financial support.

2.5 Negative Role Models



2.5.1 Option 1: Establish youth empowerment programs that provide alternatives to negative influences and offer positive role models

Considering that sex workers and ‘malaichas’ were found to be role models, having programs where local AGYW are groomed to become positive role models themselves would be essential in addressing the influence of negative role models. This could be achieved through identifying AGYW with the potential to succeed in their fields of influence, be they academic, entrepreneurial or leadership, and providing them with mentorship, establishing role modelling support networks and strengthening their economic empowerment and independence. These programs will also offer a supportive environment where AGYW can develop their skills, confidence, and resilience. By engaging in activities, such as mentorship, skill-building workshops, leadership training, and community service projects, AGYW will be encouraged to explore their potential and pursue their goals. Through these initiatives, programs can link the identified AGYW to inspiring individuals who serve as their role models, strengthening their capacity and confidence to become effective role models.

However, grooming role models is crucial not only for AGYW but for adolescent boys and young men as well. Excluding them from role modelling programs results in adolescent boys and young men continuing to follow negative role models who engage in drugs and substance abuse, hence maintaining a risk factor that directly influences AGYW sexual practices. While programs that involve role modeling for adolescents and young people are not new in

⁵Gong, E. and De Walque, D., 2019. "Coping with Risk: Negative Shocks, Transactional Sex, and the Limitations of Conditional Cash Transfers." *Journal of Health Economics* 67(6).


Matabeleland South, they require strengthening and widespread implementation. Considering the geographic location of the province, designing role modelling initiatives that involve both boys and girls will foster healthy relationships, respect, and understanding between them. Drawing inspiration from Padare, who utilised village heads as role models in ending gender-based violence, using role models will pave the way for a more inclusive and equitable society where both boys and girls can thrive and contribute to their communities growth without the influence of negative role models. This approach not only enhances the well-being and safety of AGYW but also contributes to the overall development of adolescents and young people, creating a more inclusive and equitable society. Therefore, working with organisations like **Padare and the Ministry of Youth** will enhance the efforts of youth empowerment programs that provide alternatives to negative influences and offer positive role models.

2.5.2 Option 2: Establish youth hubs/centres that allow for supportive community environments that provide alternatives to negative role models and behaviors.

Establishing youth hubs or centres that foster supportive community environments is crucial as they can serve as safe spaces where adolescents and young people can access comprehensive HIV prevention education, testing, and treatment services. By offering a supportive community environment, these centres can effectively engage adolescents and youth in discussions about sexual health, relationships, and risk reduction strategies. Furthermore, these hubs can provide opportunities for mentorship and skills development, which are essential for empowering adolescents and young people to make informed decisions about their sexual health and overall well-being.

While youth centers are available in Matabeleland South, they have provided limited opportunities to offer alternatives to negative role models and behaviors. Organisations like Matobo Youth Development Initiative and Plan International have utilised youth centres in disseminating information on SRH and HIV but with limited focus on role models. By fully utilising these spaces, environments that inspire and empower young people through education, mentorship, recreational activities, and community involvement can be created. Creating spaces that prioritise inclusivity, respect, and education, youth hubs can play a vital role in reducing HIV infection rates among adolescents and young people in Mata-


beleland South while also addressing broader social determinants of health. Additionally, they serve as platforms for promoting acceptance, reducing stigma, and fostering a sense of belonging among marginalised adolescents and youth, ultimately contributing to healthier and more resilient communities.

 Therefore, to effectively implement this recommendation, partnering with CSOs, NGOs, and Government ministries such as the Ministry of Youth, village development communities (VIDCOs), and ward development communities (WADCOS) is essential.

2.6 Drug and Substance Abuse



2.6.1 Option 1: Strengthen and accelerate comprehensive public education and awareness programs and campaigns in schools and communities to enhance prevention strategies and raise awareness about the risks and consequences of drug and substance abuse.

 Develop and implement comprehensive drug and substance abuse education programs in schools and communities, providing accurate information about the effects of drug and substance abuse on physical and mental health, as well as their impact on relationships, academics, and life prospects.

These programs should engage community leaders, parents, teachers, and local organisations, fostering community partnerships to provide support networks and resources for youths, including recreational facilities and after-school programs. As part of these programs, parents should be educated about the warning signs of substance abuse and provided with resources and support to help them communicate effectively with their children about the risks of drug abuse. Encouraging parent-child communication would strengthen parental involvement in their children's lives so that parents can quickly detect possible causes of stress for their children and help address them. This is important because adolescents and youth often turn to drugs and alcohol when something in their life is missing or not working.







This recommendation is not new since awareness programs on drug and substance abuse have begun in churches, schools and communities across Zimbabwe. However, the extent of drug and substance

abuse that was witnessed in Matabeleland South, **especially in Beitbridge and Matobo districts**, requires an acceleration or strengthening of the ongoing efforts with a focus on enhancing the role of parents and guardians. This is of critical importance considering the intersection of drug and substance abuse with HIV infection among AGYW.

Public education and awareness campaigns punctuated by testimonies from survivors of drug and substance addiction are being done across Zimbabwe with a greater focus on young people. These efforts need to be accelerated and strengthened, emphasising the importance of parent-child communication and parents' ability to identify signs and sources of stress among their children and address these as a prevention strategy.

A UNICEF study revealed that,

The infographic consists of seven red icons on a light pink background, each with a corresponding text label to its right:

-  **Death of Parent(s),**
-  **Poverty and idleness,**
-  **Absent parents,**
-  **Broken homes**
-  **Inadequate parenting practices, and**
-  **Stress**

were some of the reasons for drug and substance abuse⁶, and the role of parents and guardians in all these is evident.

Effective implementation of this recommendation requires the Ministry of Local Government, the Department of Social Welfare and the Ministry of Youth to take the lead with support from Churches, Community leaders and CBOs.

2.6.2 Option 2: Develop and implement peer pressure strategies that promote positive peer influence against drug and substance abuse, including the establishment of positive peer networks early in adolescence

The direct link between drug and substance abuse and HIV infections came out clear in the study as participants highlighted the increase in unprotected sex when both AGYW and their sexual partners are under the influence of drugs and alcohol.

Adolescents are the most vulnerable to the social pressures that lead to experimental and then regular use of psychoactive substances, hence the need to establish positive peer networks early in adolescence. Well-designed prevention programs for this age group have the potential to prevent the onset and development of regular drug use.

- ▶ Encouraging positive peer influence by fostering supportive peer relationships and promoting healthy lifestyles among adolescents is important.

Associating with drug-abusing peers is a significant risk factor in adolescence.

- ▶ Increasing prevention-related drug knowledge and resistance skills can provide adolescents with the information and skills needed to develop anti-drug attitudes and norms, as well as to resist peer and media pressure to use drugs.⁷

According to the National Crime Prevention Centre (2009), if adolescents are supported to develop positive peer relationships within networks of non-drug using peers, chances of engaging in drug and substance abuse are reduced. Some of the strategies that could be used to promote positive peer influence against drug and substance abuse include teaching adolescents and youth effective self-management skills and social skills that can improve their personal and social competencies.⁸

⁶UNICEF. 2023. "Understanding Drug Use and Substance Abuse by Zimbabwean Adolescents and Young People." Accessed? <https://www.unicef.org/zimbabwe/reports/understanding-drug-use-and-substance-abuse-zimbabwean-adolescents-and-young-people>

⁷National Crime Prevention Centre (NCPC). 2009. "School-Based Drug Abuse Prevention: Promising and Successful Programs." Accessed? <https://healtheducationresources.unesco.org/library/documents/school-based-drug-abuse-prevention-promising-and-successful-programs>

⁸Nurmala, I., Pertiwi, E. D., Muthmainnah, M., Rachmayanti, R. D., Devi, Y. P., Harris, N., Wiseman, N., & Li, C. Y. 2021. Peer-To-Peer Education to Prevent Drug Use: A Qualitative Analysis of the Perspectives of Student Peer Educators From Surabaya, Indonesia. Health promotion journal of Australia : official journal of Australian Association of Health Promotion Professionals, 32(2), 206-211.

These competencies have the potential of having a psychological impact on reduced intrapersonal motivations to use drug abuse and subsequently reducing vulnerability to pro-drug social influences.⁹

This is a new recommendation to be implemented in Matabeleland South province to reduce drug and substance abuse and, in the process, reduce HIV incidence among AGYW. The MOPSE could take the lead in pushing the implementation of this recommendation with support from the United Nations, particularly the Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), NGOs and CBOs.

2.7 Non-disclosure of HIV status



2.7.1 Opinion 1: Organise new public campaigns and forums to reduce stigma and discrimination and facilitate non-disclosure of perinatally acquired HIV status by parents/caregivers and intimate partners

To address the issue of non-disclosure of perinatally acquired HIV status by parents/caregivers to adolescents, the organisation of fresh public campaigns and forums aimed at reducing stigma and discrimination while promoting the disclosure of HIV status is a new recommendation. These initiatives should go beyond previous efforts by incorporating innovative and compelling messages centered around compassion, tolerance, empathy, and support. It is important to draw upon historical evidence that demonstrates the effectiveness of public campaigns and testimonials from infected individuals, including influential figures, in reducing stigma during the peak of the HIV epidemic.

The campaigns that focus on promoting HIV status disclosure to intimate partners have been carried out by development partners such as USPG¹⁰ and government stakeholders. However, strengthening of these campaigns still needs to be carried out considering that adolescents and youth, as well as their intimate partners, do not disclose their HIV status to each other. By involving people living with HIV and AIDS in all aspects of the campaigns, including policy development, programmatic activities, and community engagement, a human face can be given to the

epidemic, reaffirming the value of people with HIV and AIDS and fostering attitude change.

To address the high incidence of HIV in Matabeleland South, these campaigns should be tailored to the specific context of the province, actively working to reduce the prevailing stigma and discrimination. Additionally, involving parents and/or guardians of perinatally infected children in public campaigns can provide an opportunity for them to share successful testimonies of disclosing their children's HIV status. These testimonials should emphasise the potential harm caused by non-disclosure, particularly when the children become sexually active during adolescence. By implementing these recommendations involving key stakeholders, such as people living with HIV and AIDS, policymakers, civil society organisations, healthcare professionals, and community leaders, a comprehensive and effective strategy can be developed to tackle the challenge of non-disclosure of HIV status.

2.8 Barriers to Accessing HIV prevention, testing and treatment services



2.8.1 Option 2: Partner with youth led organisations to expand HIV prevention services and reach vulnerable populations in Matabeleland South

Partnering with youth-led organisations, including AGYW led organisations, to expand HIV prevention services is a novel approach that has not been implemented in Zimbabwe before. These partnerships will bring together the expertise and perspectives of young people who have lived experiences and a deep understanding of the cultural context in Matabeleland South. By collaborating with youth-led organisations, the expansion and strengthening of HIV prevention services can leverage their existing networks and resources within communities. This enhances the effectiveness of outreach efforts and ensures the sustainability of HIV prevention initiatives. Youth-led organisations have a unique ability to connect with vulnerable populations as they understand the specific challenges and barriers faced by adolescents and young people.

In Matabeleland South, it has been observed that

⁹Ibid

¹⁰USPG. n.d. "HIV Stigma Reduction Program." Accessed? <https://www.uspg.org.uk/our-partners/programmes/africa/central-africa/central-africa-5439.php>

AGYW fear being judged and scolded by nurses at healthcare facilities, which hinders their access to HIV prevention services. Peer-to-peer education, advocacy, and community mobilisation through youth-led organisations will be crucial to address this issue. Engaging young people as peer educators and advocates can create a safe and supportive environment for AGYW to access their needed services. Involving youth leaders will not only strengthen the impact of prevention initiatives but also nurture their leadership skills and empower them to become agents of change.

Additionally, youth-led initiatives can employ innovative and interactive approaches, such as theater, art, music, and digital media, to effectively disseminate HIV prevention messages and engage young audiences.

These creative strategies can help overcome the fear of judgment and stigma that often deter adolescents and young people from seeking HIV-related services.

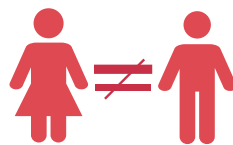


By involving young people in the design and implementation of HIV prevention programs, they are empowered to take ownership of their health and foster a sense of trust and credibility among their peers.

This collaborative approach enhances the reach and impact of HIV prevention efforts while also building the resilience and agency of young people in the face of HIV and AIDS. To drive the recommendation, the key stakeholders include youth-led organisations, AGYW representatives, community leaders, local healthcare providers, and relevant government agencies. Engaging these stakeholders from the planning stage ensures that the recommendation aligns with the priorities and needs of the community. Their collective expertise, resources, and networks will be instrumental in implementing and sustaining the expanded HIV prevention services in Matabeleland South. By working together, a

comprehensive and youth-centred approach can be created, thus effectively addressing the HIV prevention needs of vulnerable populations in the region.

2.9 Gender Inequality / SGBV



2.9.1 Option 1: Foster partnerships with community-based organisations, traditional and religious leaders, and other stakeholders to challenge harmful gender norms and promote gender equality, as well as engage men and boys as allies in addressing SGBV and promoting positive masculinity

The study revealed that the primary source of harmful gender norms encountered by adolescent girls and young women in Matabeleland South originates from their male counterparts. These detrimental gender norms stem from myths and misconceptions surrounding HIV prevention and treatment. Thus, collaborating with diverse groups, community-based organisations, religious leaders, boys and men helps to tap into unique perspectives, networks, and resources to enact meaningful change. Community-based organisations offer grassroots-level insights and connections within local communities, enabling tailored interventions and advocacy efforts. Religious leaders and institutions wield significant influence and can be crucial in reinterpreting religious teachings to promote gender equality and respect. Engaging them in dialogue and training fosters allyship in addressing SGBV and advocating for women's rights. Educational institutions provide platforms for integrating gender equality principles into curricula and implementing prevention programs targeting students and educators alike. Working collaboratively with these stakeholders helps to challenge entrenched gender norms, empower marginalised voices, and build a more inclusive and equitable society for all. While engaging key stakeholders that include traditional leaders and community-based organisations is not new, their involvement remains essential for the success and sustainability of initiatives aimed at empowering adolescents and young people and fostering positive change within communities. For example, Padare

utilised village heads as male champions in ending gender-based violence, demonstrating the powerful impact of involving respected community figures in addressing critical social issues.

Additionally, engaging men and boys as allies in addressing sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) and promoting positive masculinity is crucial for creating lasting societal change.



These efforts can be facilitated through targeted educational programs, workshops, and community outreach initiatives that challenge harmful gender norms and promote healthy relationships and behaviors. By involving men and boys in conversations about consent, respect, and gender equality, they can be empowered to become advocates for change within their communities and challenge toxic masculinity norms that perpetuate violence and discrimination. This can include fostering empathy and promoting bystander intervention techniques, encouraging men and boys to speak out against instances of SGBV and supporting survivors.



Additionally, providing opportunities for men and boys to reflect on their attitudes and behaviors, as well as offering resources and support for those who may have experienced trauma themselves, can facilitate personal growth and transformation. By promoting positive masculinity and engaging men and boys as allies, a safer and more inclusive environment for all individuals is created, ultimately contributing to the prevention of SGBV and the promotion of gender equality.



Therefore, working with key stakeholders like Padare, CSOs and NGOs, and Government ministries, such as the Ministry of Women Affairs and the Victim

Friendly Unit (VFU) will enhance the efforts of ending SGBV with communities.

2.10 Men and Boys are being left out of HIV programs



2.10.1 Option 1: Design and implement programs that empower men and boys to better understand SRH and HIV and increase their related service uptake

According to the World Health Organization (2023)¹¹, improving men's HIV testing and treatment coverage could reduce HIV incidence among women by half. However, findings from the study highlight poor health seeking behavior, low uptake of condoms and limited access to HIV related services among adolescent boys and young men, as compared to AGYW, all stemming from the limited male inclusion in HIV programs in Matabeleland South. While the design and implementation of SRH and HIV related programs that specifically target adolescent boys and young men is not necessarily new to Zimbabwe, it is vastly limited in Matabeleland South. Considering that issues around stigma, discrimination and lack of confidentiality around HIV constitute the roots of poor health seeking behavior among the male demographic of Matabeleland South, adolescent boys and young men would significantly benefit from relevant programs designed specifically to address their SRH and HIV related needs. In so doing, the outcomes and subsequent impact of male centered HIV programs would be strengthened not only for the adolescent boys and young men but for the AGYW as well. While programs such as 'Zvandiri' present an opportunity for enhanced male engagement in HIV programs in the province, the organisation has been stigmatised in Matabeleland South, hence the limited involvement of adolescent boys and young men.

Complementary to this would be identifying male champions trained to spearhead SRH and HIV prevention in their communities by providing them with information and resources to share with their peers. These male champions also become role

¹¹World Health Organisation (WHO). 2023. "Men and HIV: Evidence-Based Approaches and Interventions." Accessed? [Men and HIV: evidence-based approaches and interventions \(who.int\)](https://www.who.int/evidence-based-approaches-and-interventions)

models who showcase the positive effects of being boys and/or men who are supportive of gender equality and promoting SRH and HIV prevention, testing and treatment. Targeting men and boys is also crucial for improving the coverage of HIV testing and prevention services, which would, in turn, lead to early detection and reduced transmission risk. It would also result in reduced stigma and discrimination as their involvement breaks down societal barriers and reduces the stigma associated with HIV, hence fostering a more accepting environment. Therefore, key stakeholders to be involved in driving SRH and HIV programs that target adolescent boys and young men include the adolescent boys and young men themselves, male PLHIV who can act as mentors, relevant Government Ministries such as the Ministry of Youth and the Ministry of Health, as well as NGOs and CBOs working with AGYW, as they may have a better appreciation of the HIV programming limitations that stem from limited involvement of adolescent boys and young men. Through involving men and boys in HIV programs, better health outcomes, reduced transmission, and improved overall well-being for individuals and families, including AGYW, may be attained.

3. Selected Recommendations

Of the 13 recommended options, 10 have been selected as the best options for addressing the factors that contribute to high HIV incidence among adolescents and young people. Below are justifications for the selected recommendations.

1. Provide a mix of edutainment including working with influential artists, to impart HIV information to young people.

- Young people are more likely to engage with and retain information when entertaining and engaging. The impact may be great when the message is delivered in a relatable way and through popular artists.

2. Provide vocational skills training opportunities to adolescent girls and young women in Matabeleland South to increase their earning potential and overall economic independence.

- Providing AGYW with vocational skills training and support is a sustainable approach that directly improves their long-term economic empowerment and independence that may deter them from engaging in sex work, transactional and/or intergenerational sex. Being able to independently sustain themselves financially through economic activities will, in turn, increase AGYWs negotiation power for safe sex, the power to refuse unwanted sexual advances and to be proactive in circumstances of abuse.

3. Design family level income generating activities to boost parents' financial capacity to provide holistic care for their children and youth.

- Family level income generating activities provide sustainable family level economic empowerment that can be sustained over time and whose benefits can be life changing, not only for the AGYW but for the family. This is particularly key for reducing early and child marriages that have been driven by poverty and lack of economic empowerment.

4. Design and implement programmes that empower men and boys to better understand SRH and HIV and increase their related service uptake.

- Involving men and boys in SRH and HIV programs helps challenge harmful gender norms, promote gender equality, and foster healthier relationships. This further promotes positive health seeking behaviours and improved comprehensive understanding on SRH and HIV.

5. Foster partnerships with community-based organisations, traditional and religious leaders, and other stakeholders to challenge harmful gender norms and promote gender equality, as well as engage men and boys as allies in addressing SGBV and promoting positive masculinity.

- This harnesses collective efforts to challenge harmful gender norms, leading to more comprehensive and sustainable solutions. This approach ensures that interventions are culturally sensitive, effectively reaching and positively impacting the communities most affected by SGBV and gender inequality.

6. Partner with youth-led organisations to expand HIV prevention services and reach vulnerable populations in Matabeleland South.

- Partnering with youth-led organisations leverages the unique perspectives, creativity, and understanding of local dynamics that youth-led organisations possess. It fosters ownership and sustainability of HIV prevention efforts, thus empowering adolescents and young people to take charge of their health.

7. Establish youth hubs/centres that allow for supportive community environments that provide alternatives to negative role models and behaviours.

- Youth centres provide safe spaces for young people, giving them privacy and addressing their fears of stigma and discrimination as a wide range of SRH and HIV information and services can be provided at the centre, including HIV testing and counselling complemented by a variety of recreational activities.

8. Develop and implement peer pressure strategies that promote positive peer influence against drug and substance abuse, including the establishment of positive peer networks early in adolescence.

- This approach targets young adolescents while they are still impressionable to help them resist peer and media pressure to engage in drug and substance use. Engaging them at a formative stage prevents them from succumbing to such influences and promotes healthier lifestyle choices well into the future.

9. As a follow-up to this study, conduct case studies on some emerging factors, e.g. artisanal miners and boarder town with large population movements, to provide more information to programmers working to reduce HIV incidence amongst AGYW.

- Developing case studies will be instrumental in identifying and understanding the root causes that perpetuate HIV incidence amongst AGYW and will facilitate the design and implementation of multi-dimensional interventions that target relevant parties, such as private and public sector players and communities, etc.

10. Establish Social Safety Nets for AGYW from underprivileged families through the provision of conditional cash transfers that can be instrumental in helping AGYW meet their basic needs and reduce their reliance on child or early marriage, transactional sex and/or sex work.

- Designed primarily to alleviate economic hardship, cash transfers allow for vulnerable populations, such as AGYW from underprivileged families or child-headed families, to gain much needed financial support and ultimately reduce their economic vulnerability. To qualify for the cash transfer disbursements, beneficiaries can be given targets around safer sex practices and health seeking behaviour or testing negative for sexually transmitted infections (STIs).

4. Conclusion

To effectively deliver HIV programs that yield positive results in reducing HIV incidence among AGYW, the recommendations provided above require sector wide collaborative effort in resource mobilisation, design, and implementation for transformative action. These recommendations provide a holistic approach to addressing the factors that contribute to high HIV incidence at the individual, family, institutional and community levels. Therefore, this report should be widely disseminated to different stakeholders to allow them to facilitate the design and implementation of relevant programs in Matabeleland South.



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