

The POWER Study: Protecting Our Women through Empowerment and Resilience

Evaluating a combination HIV prevention and sexual and reproductive health package for at-risk young women: a demonstration project.

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Problem statement:

In Malawi and South Africa, as in much of sub-Saharan Africa, young women 15-24 years of age are at very high risk of acquiring HIV: 5.2% of those in Malawi and 11.4% in SA are HIV positive. HIV prevalence among young women is several times higher than their male counterparts and also several times higher than young women in other parts of the world. These two countries account for 21% of all HIV infections globally in this age group. There is an urgent need for a combination HIV prevention package for young women in this region, but to date no such a package has been implemented or evaluated.

Purpose:

To build on the best evidence to date to develop three combination HIV prevention/sexual and reproductive health (SRH) packages for young women and evaluate them in two countries through implementation research.

Target group:

Young women 15-24 years of age in Malawi and South Africa.

Settings:

Malawi – urban and peri-urban parts of the Central Region.

South Africa – Clinics in Klipfontein/Mitchells Plain Sub-district in the Crossroads/Mitchells Plain and Phillippi areas in the Western Cape Province.

Four health facilities in each country

Scope of Work:

Integrated prevention packages

The study aims to develop and evaluate three different combinations of interventions and assess them in Malawi and South Africa. In each country four comparable clinics will be chosen and assigned to one of the following 4 study arms:

- **Standard of care** (current level of services)
- **Combo package of sexual and and reproductive health services**, including individual and couple HIV counselling and testing, provision of contraception and condoms, screening for sexually transmitted infections, provision of pre-exposure prophylaxis (if available), and referrals for other sexual and reproductive health services
- **Combo package plus empowerment sessions**
- **Combo package plus a monthly cash transfer.**

Evaluation

Each clinic will enrol 250 adolescent girls and young women who will be assessed at baseline, month 6, and month 12.

Through a quasi-experimental design the study aims to

1. Describe the uptake of each element of the combo package; uptake of combinations of the combo package as well as uptake of the empowerment sessions and cash transfers. It will determine if uptake differs by study arm and assess factors associated with uptake in each country.
2. Describe adherence to each element of the combo package and adherence to combinations of combo package as well as adherence to empowerment sessions and cash transfers. It will determine if adherence differs by study arm and assess factors associated with adherence in each country.
3. Describe risk behaviours; determine if there are differences in risk behaviours by study arm; and assess factors associated with risk factors in each country.
4. Describe barriers and facilitators of uptake and adherence to the package and understand how the different packages operate to reduce risk. This qualitative information will be used to improve the packages.

Outcomes

After 12 months, participants will be assessed for sexual and care-seeking behaviours based on self-report and clinic records. Sexual and care-seeking behaviour and behaviour change at 6 and 12 months will be compared between the four clinics in each country.