

HERStory Research Briefs
Health Systems Research Unit

Talking about PrEP

South African Adolescent Girls and Young Women's communication about pre-exposure prophylaxis with partners, parents and peers

SUMMARY

- In response to the persistently high HIV prevalence among South African adolescent girls and young women (AGYW), HIV prevention programmes have prioritised providing pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) to this population. However, PrEP uptake and adherence among AGYW is challenging.
- Effective communication about PrEP with partners, parents and peers increases PrEP initiation and improves adherence.
- This qualitative study found that the barriers to effective communication included limited information about PrEP and PrEP-related stigma, particularly fears that when discussing PrEP, one would be perceived as being sexually active and promiscuous.
- PrEP education and promotion campaigns should be implemented to educate communities, parents, boys, men and AGYW's peers about PrEP, and to raise awareness and promote effective communication about PrEP between AGYW and their partners, parents and peers.

Authors

Babalwa Sindi, Zoe Duby, Kate Bergh, Kim Jonas, Mari Lotvonen, Catherine Mathews

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THE ISSUE

- AGYW are more vulnerable to HIV infection compared to their male counterparts
- Effective communication about sexual and reproductive health (SRH) between AGYW and their parents and partners has been associated with positive SRH outcomes.
- Ineffective communication with parents and partners is usually due to discomfort in discussing SRH-related topics, cultural norms and insufficient knowledge about SRH.
- Failure to include boys, men, communities and parents in SRH education campaigns contributes to the lack of knowledge and communication skills that lead to ineffective SRH communication.
- Therefore, this study examined barriers to, facilitators of, and effects of PrEP communication among AGYW in South Africa.

RESEARCH OVERVIEW

This study analysed data from the qualitative component of the HERStory 3 Impact Evaluation of the My Journey Programme a combination HIV prevention programme for AGYW in South Africa.

- The study employed qualitative in-depth telephone interviews to collect data in seven South African provinces.
- A total of 68 interviews were conducted with participant's consent and parental consent for those under the age of 18 years.
- Interviews were conducted in participant's language of choice, recorded with participant's consent and directly transcribed and translated into English from the original languages.
- Thematic analysis was used to analyse data.

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WHAT WE FOUND

Barriers to PrEP Communication

- Findings showed that there are several barriers to effective communication between partners, parents and peers.
- Barriers between AGYW and partners included PrEP stigma related to PrEP's association with promiscuity and being HIV positive, specifically a fear of judgment from partners and a fear that talking about PrEP demonstrated a lack of trust in their partner.
- Barriers to PrEP communication between AGYW and their parents included insufficient PrEP knowledge among AGYW and a fear of judgement, suggesting that AGYW would prefer parents to raise sex related topics.
- AGYW fear that parents would associate AGYW's discussions about PrEP with promiscuity and being sexually active.
- Judgement and peer power dynamics amongst peers also serves as a barrier to PrEP communication between AGYW and their peers.

Facilitators of PrEP Communication:

- Open communication between AGYW and their partners and parents served as a facilitator to PrEP communication.
- Parents that are open to talk with their daughters about sensitive topics made it easier for AGYW to raise the topic of PrEP with their parents.
- Mutual understanding and relatability made it easier for AGYW and their peers to talk about PrEP.

Benefits of PrEP Communication:

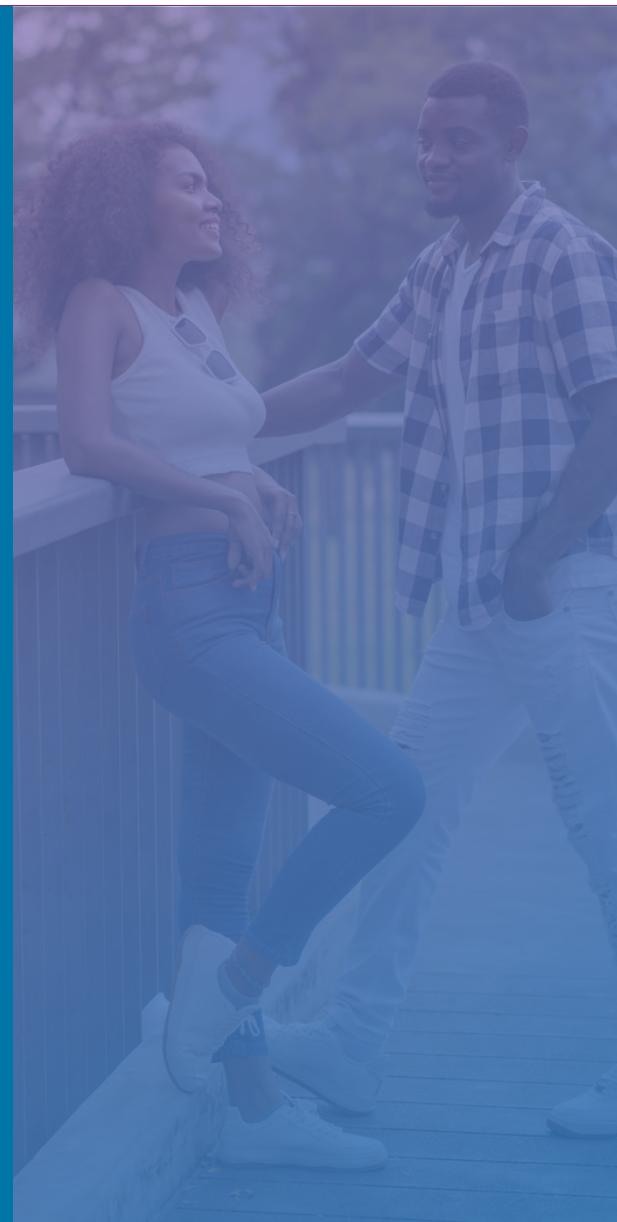
- Benefits of effective PrEP communication included spreading knowledge about PrEP, increasing motivation to take up and use PrEP, and supporting continuation on PrEP particularly through support received from parents.



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IMPLICATIONS

- The barriers to effective communication highlight the need for community PrEP awareness campaigns and education programmes that should include men, boys, communities, parents and peers which is likely to result in reduced PrEP stigma, enhanced PrEP communication and subsequent uptake.
- Lack of information about PrEP hinders PrEP communication between parents and AGYW and this shows that interventions and programmes should provide AGYW and their parents with accurate information. This would result in more effective communication about PrEP between AGYW and their parents enabling AGYW to make healthy decisions through parental involvement and support.
- Parental involvement in PrEP education and promotion campaigns will enable AGYW to talk freely with parents about PrEP and might dispel misinformation about PrEP, improve PrEP acceptability and uptake
- Also, AGYW are easily influenced by peers, suggesting that promoting peer to peer education on PrEP could play a critical role in improving PrEP uptake in South Africa.
- Including PrEP in Life Orientation at school is another implementation approach that will ensure reaching both girls and boys and people in all relationship types .



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