

Key Paper

The Regai Dzive Shiri Project: a cluster randomised controlled trial to determine the effectiveness of a multi-component community-based HIV prevention intervention for rural youth in Zimbabwe – study design and baseline results.

Cowan FM, Pascoe SJ, Langhaug LF, Dirawo J, Chidiya S, Jaffar S *et al.* *Trop Med Int Health* 2008;**13**:1235–1244.

This study assessed the effectiveness of a community-based HIV prevention intervention for adolescents, in terms of its impact on (1) HIV and herpes simplex virus type 2 (HSV-2) incidence and on rates of unintended pregnancy and (2) reported sexual behaviour, knowledge and attitudes. The format was a cluster randomized trial of a multi-component HIV prevention intervention for adolescents based in rural Zimbabwe. Thirty communities were selected and randomized in 2003 to early or deferred intervention implementation. A baseline bio-behavioural survey was conducted among 6791 secondary school pupils (86% of eligibles) prior to intervention implementation. Baseline prevalences were 0.8% (95% confidence intervals [CI]: 0.6–1.0) for HIV and 0.2% (95% CI: 0.1–0.3%) for HSV-2. Four girls (0.12%) were pregnant. There was excellent balance between study

arms. Orphans (35% of the cohort) were at increased risk of HIV (age–sex adjusted odds ratio 3.4 [95% CI:1.7–6.5]); 11.9% of young men and 2.9% of young women reported being sexually active ($P<0.001$). However, there were inconsistencies in the sexual behaviour data: girls were less likely to know about reproductive health issues than boys ($P<0.001$) and were less likely to have used and to be able to access condoms ($P<0.001$). This is one of the first rigorous evaluations of a community-based HIV prevention intervention for young people in southern Africa. The low rates of HIV suggest that the intervention was started before this population became sexually active. Inconsistency and under-reporting of sexual behaviour re-emphasize the importance of using externally validated measures of sexual risk reduction in behavioural intervention studies.