The global HIV/AIDS pandemic continuously highlights the devastating burden of disease that falls on many young women and South Africa is often considered the epicenter of this pandemic. This burden of disease can partially be attributed to many prevention techniques that require male consent. Conversely, however, microbicides can be applied topically within the vagina and are a promising HIV prevention method for women. Like many prevention initiatives though, the efficacy of microbicides relies heavily upon adherence to drug regimens. Proven to positively motivate adherence, communication about microbicides with a sexual partner is a crucial element in HIV prevention.

HIV in South Africa

The African continent. South Africa has an extremely high prevalence of HIV, as indicated by the darkest shading. The age range represented is for those aged 15-24 on the African continent. South Africa is unique because it serves as a community safe haven for individuals infected with or impacted by HIV and is located at a crossroads for a black township, colored community, and white suburb.

Map 1: Primary Prevention in Young Women (15-24) in South Africa

Map 2: HIV Prevalence Among Young Men (15-24)

Map 3: AIDS Related Deaths (All Ages)

Map 4: Knowledge About HIV Prevention Among Young People (15-24)

Methods

- Participants: males and females ages 18 to 24 years
- Study design: focus groups were created within an already existing health club framework at a local youth center.
- Location: this youth center is unique because it serves as a community safe haven for individuals infected with or impacted by HIV and is located at a crossroads for a black township, colored community, and white suburb.
- Timeline: a total of 116 responses were recorded from focus groups over the course of 12 weeks.

Social Factors Affecting Microbicide Acceptability: a qualitative study focused on pre-exposure prophylaxis use in the Southern Cape Peninsula

Megan Auzenbergs, B.A.

Future Recommendations

1. Spread awareness about microbicides and PrEP through social media and advertising campaigns in the community
2. Improve awareness and knowledge about microbicides amongst youth center staff
3. Increase PrEP education in order to reduce misconceptions
4. Educate youth about stigma and ways to eliminate stigma through positive word of mouth
5. Conduct more focus groups and health clubs so that youth have an outlet to discuss personal sexual matters

Conclusion

This study highlights the shortcomings in sexual health education at the youth center and also draws attention to the social barriers affecting HIV prevention. The focus groups conducted for this project were unique because of their light-hearted atmosphere and therefore lead to a very positive experience for respondents. Many respondents expressed gratitude after the conclusion of these focus groups and were appreciative for the private, safe and trusting environment that the focus groups provided surrounding HIV education.

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Contact Information: mauzenb1@jhu.edu

Question (1): Do you think HIV prevention is important? If so, why?

Question (2): What prevention measures do you already know of?

Question (3): Have you ever heard about microbicides? What do you know about them?

Question (4): What types of social factors do you think would influence someone’s decision to use microbicides?

Question (5): If you or your partner were to use microbicides, would you tell one another? Or why not?

Question (6): What are ways that you think the youth center can help address these social factors associated with microbicide use?

Age and Gender Response

21-year-old male: "There are women who are HIV positive and then they get pregnant and then their baby can get HIV too, so that’s why prevention is important."

24-year-old female: "HIV prevention is important because if you get infected, it can be a turning point in your life. You can either let it get you down, or you can look at ways of treating yourself and protecting yourself from getting infected.

25-year-old male: "HIV prevention can be important especially in the context of rape."

Age and Gender Response

20-year-old male: "I don’t think people are clear about microbicides because they don’t understand scientific words. So even if we want prevention, we don’t know the scientific words for types of PrEP."

17 total responses were collected: 12 respondents said yes, 4 respondents said no, and 1 response was conditional.

Yes/No/Conditional Response

21-year-old female: "If I am using the gel and I tell my boyfriend, then maybe he will persuade him to come and get PrEP (Plus)"

20-year-old male: "If I were with a girl for a long time, then I would tell her. But if I’ve been with a girl for a long time, then I would tell her."

Conditional Response

22-year-old male: "I don’t think people don’t hear about microbicides they won’t know how to use them... People find out everything through gossip in our community and so if they say positive things about PrEP then others will learn."

Age and Gender Response

20-year-old male: "They need to advertise about rings and gels in a book or pamphlet. We just know it’s a ring or a gel, we don’t know what it’s about. The government should advertise microbicides too... Social media has a huge effect on how people accept or choose to use or not use the method."