



Adolescent Girls and Young Women

An evidence update from UKRI GCRF Accelerating Achievement for Africa's Adolescents (Accelerate) Hub – March 2020

Photo credit: Interfer

The Accelerate Hub is a research collaboration led by Oxford University and the University of Cape Town funded by the UK Research and Innovation Global Challenges Research Fund (UKRI GCRF). It is managed by interdisciplinary academics. The Accelerate Hub works on identifying accelerators for adolescent development and well-being in Africa.

THE GLOBAL FUND: AGYW PROGRAMME CHALLENGES

The 2018 GF *Step up the fight* report highlights the challenges in achieving the 90-90-90 HIV targets to AGYW across Africa. These include:

- The lack of age-disaggregated and HIV epidemiological data to inform effective HIV programming for AGYW
- The knowledge gaps around both behavioural risk factors in Sub-Saharan Africa and the acceptability of interventions and services to AGYW
- The barriers to reaching key young populations groups (e.g. AGYW who are in prison and LGBTI) and enabling their involvement
- The challenge in building sustainable systems that support AGYW throughout their lives.

BRIDGING THE GAPS

The Accelerate Hub team works on generating both qualitative and quantitative evidence on African adolescents. The team also has experience in adolescent co-creation, especially via Teen Advisory Groups (TAGs). The Accelerate Hub supports an evidence-driven and collaborative approach towards improving outcomes in AGYW.

OVERVIEW – THE PROBLEM

African youth are the world's fastest growing population according to UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, with an expected rise to half a billion by 2050. The 2019 HIV report from UNAIDS states that 60% of new HIV infections among the 15 to 24 age group were contracted by girls and women. As a group, they have been consistently 'left behind' from development and struggle to meet Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) and targets.

Through the HIV Epidemic Response (HER) initiative, the Global Fund aims to reduce the incidence of HIV among adolescent girls and young women (AGYW) by 58% in 13 African countries by 2022. To support an evidence-driven approach to this work, this evidence update highlights the relevant findings and successful interventions that have been identified by researchers at the Accelerate Hub.

WHAT ARE THE BOTTLENECKS?

Adolescent girls and young women experience disadvantage on account of both their gender and their age.

BOTTLENECKS FOR FEMALES	ADDITIONAL AGE-RELATED BARRIERS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In Uganda, a study with 3662 adolescent participants reported that female children are three times more likely to be sexually abused than male children² • In post-conflict countries, one study shows that young females are more exposed to a combination of abuse types – physical, emotional and sexual – whereas males are more likely to experience one form at a time² • One study in Rwanda and Uganda found that 25% of teenage girls have experienced sexual abuse² • HIV risk is strongly linked to higher economic disparity between partners, where one partner (usually male) has significantly greater financial means than the other.⁷ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Post-conflict regions in Central and Southern Africa report high rates of abuse from caregivers^{2,3} • Post-traumatic stress amongst caregivers promotes intergenerational cycles of abuse² • In South Africa, only 25% of adolescents report consistent parenting supervision³ • In South Africa, youth report higher rates of verbal victimisation by healthcare workers than adults³ • HIV clinics in Sub-Saharan Africa often have no adolescent-sensitive approaches or services^{6,7} • The judiciary definition of 'abuse' still differs greatly in Africa. As a result, many incidents of adolescent abuse are not yet considered unlawful² • A qualitative study in South Africa shows that adolescents living with HIV (ALHIV) commonly express shame, guilt and suicidality.¹³

PUBLISHED ACADEMIC PAPERS:

1 Improving lives by accelerating the Sustainable Development Goals for adolescents living with HIV
doi.org/10.1016/S2352-4642(19)30033-1

[open research summary](#)

2 Which factors are associated with adolescent reports of experiencing various forms of abuse at the family level in post-conflict northern Uganda?
doi.org/10.1177/0886260519888526

3 Multitype violence exposures and adolescent antiretroviral non-adherence in South Africa
https://doi.org/10.1007/s10461-019-02735-x

[open research summary](#)

4 Consistent Provisions Mitigate Exposure to Sexual Risk and HIV Among Young Adolescents in South Africa. AIDS & Behaviour
doi.org/10.1007/s10461-019-02735-x

[open research summary](#)

5 To know or not to know? HIV-status disclosure and protective sexual practices among adolescent girls and boys in South Africa
ISBN: 978-1-77011-389-3

6 School, supervision and adolescent-sensitive clinic services: combination social protection and reduced unprotected sex among HIV-positive adolescents in South Africa
doi.org/10.1007/s10461-016-1539-y

[open research summary](#)

7 Resourcing resilience: social protection for HIV prevention amongst children and adolescents in Eastern and Southern Africa
doi.org/10.2989/16085906.2016.1194299

8 Cash transfers- a magic bullet or fundamental ingredient?
doi.org/10.1016/S2214-109X(16)30295-9

WHAT WORKS?

Research from the Accelerate Hub highlights a number of potential interventions that can achieve positive outcomes for AGYW. Several may be 'development accelerators' – likely to improve progress towards multiple SDG goals and targets at the same time. Below are some examples.

SCHOOLING AND EDUCATION strongly influenced HIV outcomes in AGYW; whether directly through better medical outcomes or indirectly by reducing their risk factors.

- (Figure 1) **Safe schools** improve mental health, school progression and reduce various forms of violence ^{1,6}
- Consistently getting **one school meal a day** lowers risk of sexual exposure by 45%⁴
- **Knowledge of HIV prevention** encourages safer sex practices in youth. ^{4,5,9}

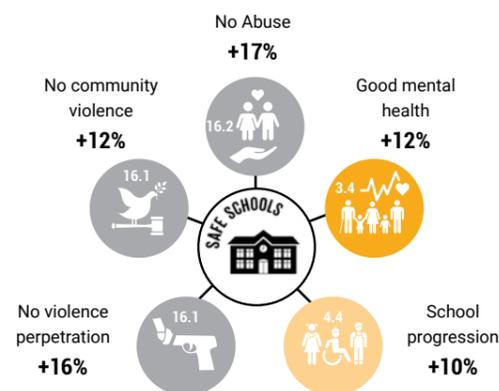


Figure 1. The positive impact of parenting interventions across multiple SDGs^{1,6}

CASH TRANSFERS were found to improve school progression, HIV adherence and lower abuse rates for youth.^{1,9,11}

In Malawi, cash transfers reduced age-disparate sex, transactional sex and HIV prevalence in AGYW.¹¹



Photo credit: Interfer

COMBINED SOCIAL PROTECTION programmes and considerations were found to achieve favourable results for AGYW.^{1,6,10}

With **school access + parenting support + adolescent-sensitive clinics**, unprotected sex dropped from 49% to 9% in AGYW compared to a drop from 22% to 4% in young men.⁶

(Figure 2) **Cash transfers + safe schools + parenting support** = improvements in mental health, HIV care retention, violence rates and high-risk sex.¹

Consistent access to **violence prevention + HIV prevention education + school meals + parenting** = 92% reduction in sexual risk exposure in youth.⁶

However, intermittent access to these services reduced the positive impact on AGYW compared to consistent care provision.⁴

STIGMA- MITIGATING MEASURES were highly regarded when interacting with ALHIV.

Non-HIV youth were included in HIV studies, so that the HIV status of an ALHIV is not disclosed by participation. ^{1,4,7,10,12} This approach may also be applicable to interventions and services.

One study recommended **using a stigma scale** to evaluate the rates and types of stigma, and the effectiveness of interventions aiming to reduce HIV stigma in Southern Africa.¹³

PARENTING SUPPORT, through provision of caregiver training, has benefits across SDGs.

It improved mental health, decreased community violence and high-risk sex; and lowered the incidence of HIV through risk reduction.^{1,4,6}

Youth in **abuse-free homes** were 47% less exposed to sexual risk.⁴

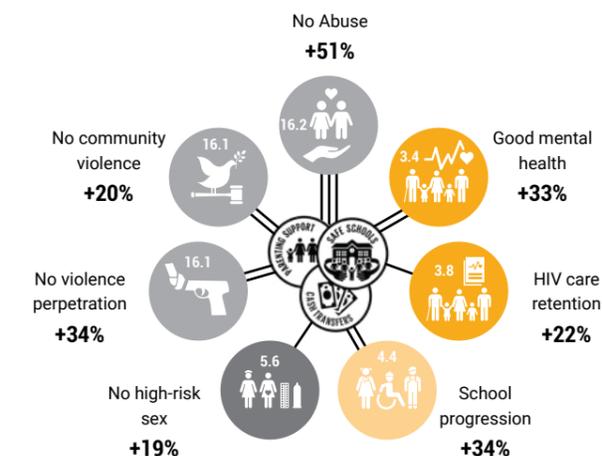


Figure 2. The impact of combined social protection across multiple SDGs¹

9 Can Social Protection Improve Sustainable Development Goals for Adolescent Health?
doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0164808

10 Sustainable Survival: Which SDGs protect against mortality risk for adolescents living with HIV?
doi.org/10.1002/jia2.25056

11 The effectiveness of using entertainment education narratives to promote safer sexual behaviours of youth: A meta-analysis.
doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0209969

12 The stuff that dreams are made of: using participatory research to explore interlinkages in HIV - positive adolescents' aspirations for development
doi.org/10.1002/jia2.25057

13 They Say HIV is a Punishment from God or from Ancestors': Cross-Cultural Adaptation and Psychometric Assessment of an HIV Stigma Scale for South African Adolescents Living with HIV (ALHIV-SS)
doi.org/10.1007/s12187-016-9428-5

“Silo-based approaches fail to capitalise on the additive effects of combined social protection”



FUNDERS AND PARTNERS:



WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR GLOBAL FUND PROGRAMMES?

The particular needs and experiences of adolescent girls and young women should be considered at all stages of programme design, planning, implementation and evaluation. To understand the barriers and challenges AGYW face in achieving good HIV and TB outcomes, evidence such as the research papers listed in this update may be useful.

Prioritise evidence-based interventions that have been shown to work for girls and young women. Consider combining interventions to achieve the targets set for HIV and TB. Interventions should prioritise prevention and reduce the risks associated with infection.

All services should be designed to be adolescent-friendly. Think about barriers to access such as cost, difficulty of travel, or stigma that may discourage adolescents (especially AGYW) from using them. How service providers engage with young people will also affect their experience and willingness to return.

Encourage youth, especially AGYW, to co-create, manage and review services wherever possible. Aim to collect gender-disaggregated data to find out who is using the service, and any differential impact on female and male users.

GETTING INVOLVED

The Accelerate Hub welcomes new partners, ideas and opportunities. For more information contact: mona.william.ibrahim@undp.org



Accelerate Hub research is in progress in several African countries.