

Adaptation, acceptability and feasibility of a shortened Stepping Stones and Creating Futures intervention focused on HIV for young men in rural South Africa



*Andrew Gibbs,^{1,2,3} Dumsani Gumede,⁴ Oluwafemi Adeagbo,^{5,6} Yandisa Sikweyiya,^{1,7} Esnat Chirwa,¹ Smanga Mkhwanazi,¹ Manono Luthuli,⁴ Zakhele Xulu,⁴ Carina Herbst,⁴ Thembelihle Zuma,⁴ Siphesihle Hlongwane,⁴ Nonhlanhla Okesola,⁴ Jaco Dreyer,⁴ Sivuyile Khaula,⁴ Laura Washington,⁴ Maryam Shahmanesh^{1,3,4}

¹Gender and Health Research Unit, South African Medical Research Council, Pretoria, South Africa; ²School of Nursing and Public Health, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Durban, South Africa; ³Institute³Institute for Global Health, University College London, London, UK; ⁴Africa Health Research Institute, Somkhele, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa; ⁵Department of Health Promotion, Education and Behaviour, Arnold School of Public Health, University of South Carolina, Columbia, USA; ⁶Department of Sociology, University of Johannesburg, Johannesburg, South Africa; ⁷School of Public Health, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa; ⁸Project Empower, Durban, South Africa

BACKGROUND

- Despite the rapid expansion of HIV-treatment globally, and advances in biomedical HIV-prevention technologies, such as VMMC, PrEP & ART
- Young men's engagement in the HIV-prevention and treatment cascade is suboptimal, due to the **structure of health systems**, and **men's gender inequitable masculinities**.
- This poor engagement leads to poorer health outcomes, higher HIV-related mortality amongst men.

Objective:

To co-adapt a strengthened evidence-based intervention, Stepping Stones and Creating Futures (SSCF), to address men's engagement in the HIV-cascades, and provide a more scalable intervention in rural South Africa.

STUDY AREA

- The Africa Health Research Institute (AHRI) is situated in uMkhanyakude District, KZN, SA. (Fig 1)
- The area is primarily rural - with a number of smaller communities with denser housing, and one large town, which young people often migrate to.
- There are high levels of unemployment.
 - unemployment and two-thirds of households receive social grants.
 - There are also high-levels of circular-migration to larger urban centres and back again.
- Among men aged 15 and above HIV-prevalence is 25%.

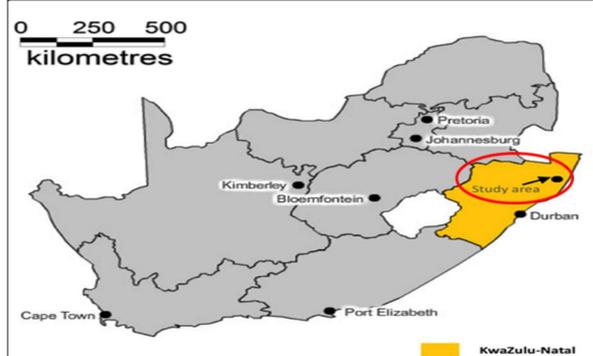


Figure 1 & 2 AHRI Surveillance Area

METHODS

- We assessed the adapted intervention's acceptability and feasibility and among young (18-35 years) men.
- We co-adapted the intervention through reviewing the current evidence base and working with male Peer Navigators to update the SSCF theory of change (ToC) and manual.
- The revised intervention was ~45 hours (9 sessions) as opposed to ~63 hours and include a greater focus on HIV-prevention and -treatment technologies.
- To assess acceptability and feasibility of the adapted intervention we conducted two mixed-methods pilots of the intervention.

Theory of Change (ToC)

- The initial ToC focused on mapping the ToC for SSCF based on the evidence and data generated over different studies
- ToC sought to outline **the structural changes** young men faced, how these shaped **young men's lived realities**, and how **SSCF impacted on young men's lives** during the intervention and how these may have led to **changes in measured outcomes**.

FINDINGS

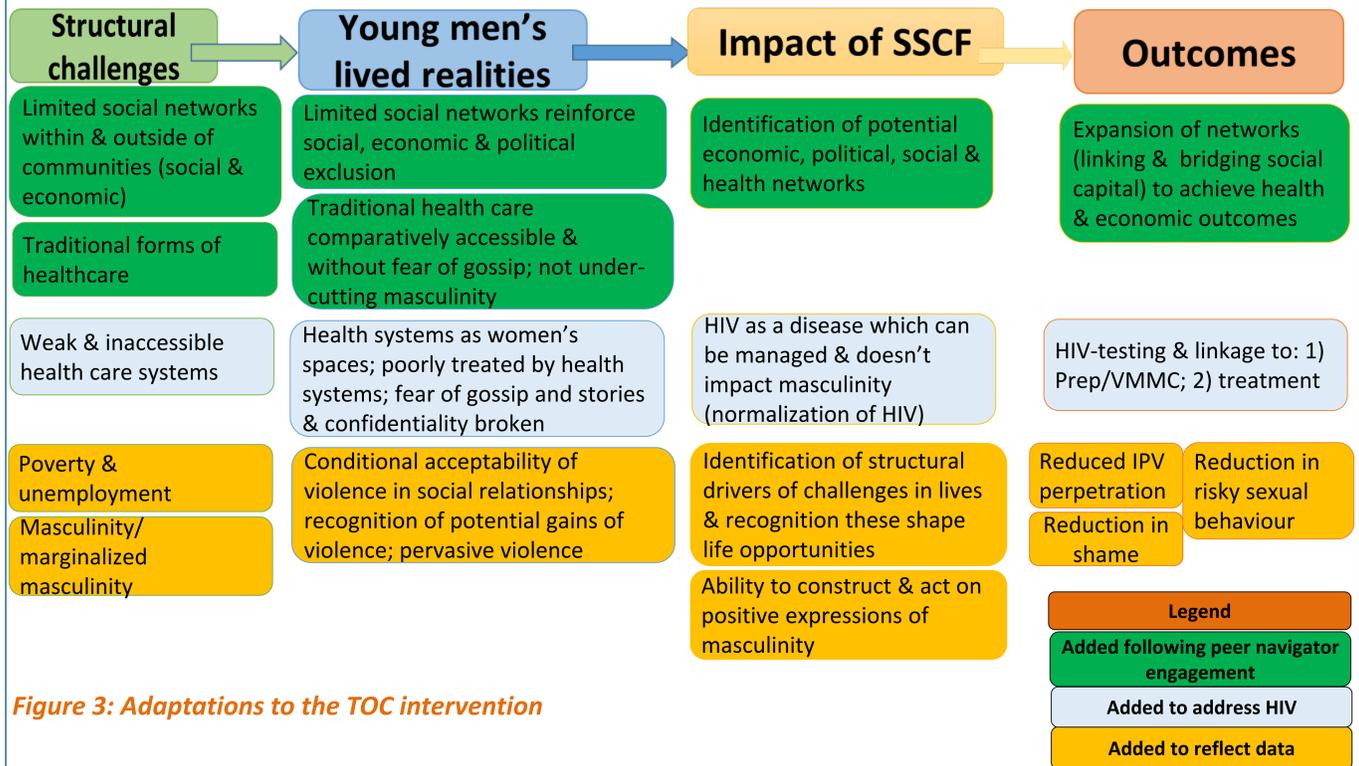


Figure 3: Adaptations to the TOC intervention

- Overall, **64% (n=60)** of men approached agreed to participate, of those **n=35(58%)** attended one session, and **n=25(71%)** of those attending 1 session, attended 6 or more sessions.
- Young men raised the issue of **use of traditional healthcare systems** and the **lack of networks** within their community which impacts on their economic opportunities.
- Acceptability** – Young men appreciated opportunity to provide inputs into the intervention and described the intervention as unique from their past experiences in previous health interventions.
- Feasibility** – Participants had primarily been 'good' attenders and described how they enjoyed the sessions and prioritized attendance, although there were competing demands such work and household tasks.
- Traditional healthcare** was more accessible compared to **biomedical healthcare** and **less likely to lead to gossip being spread**, as well as being something **'men' have been practicing for a long time**.
- The **unemployment** was a major challenge – they felt shame and pressure if they could not work and support themselves and their families.
- Young men felt **SSCF facilitating inclusiveness, networking with key stakeholders** in the communities

CONCLUSION

- We learnt that co-developing adaptations of interventions with potential beneficiaries is useful as it allows input from the people the intervention is intended for and can strengthen them.
- The adapted SSCF was acceptable, feasible and supports the ToC in our context.
- The adapted SSCF provides an important approach to addressing men's masculinities as a way to strengthen their engagement in HIV-prevention and -treatment.

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Contact: Email: dumsani.gumede@ahri.org Web: <https://www.ahri.org>