

Process evaluation: understanding the implementation and adaptation of a peer-led intervention to deliver biosocial HIV prevention for adolescents and youth in rural South Africa.

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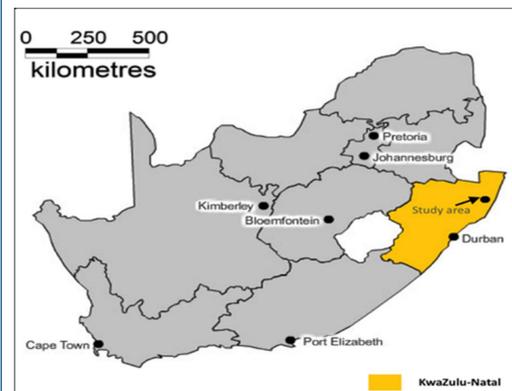
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Background

- In 2021, it is estimated that 19% of young South Africans (aged 15 – 35) are HIV Positive
- The co-created Theta Nami (Talk to me) intervention included peer support to provide health promotion and facilitate linkage to adolescent and youth-friendly services (AYFS) for HIV care and prevention

Objective

- To describe the acceptability, feasibility, and experiences of a peer-led intervention to deliver biosocial HIV prevention for adolescents and youth in rural KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa



Methods

- Mixed methods Process Evaluation
- In an individually randomised controlled trial of Theta Nami Peer support for HIV prevention amongst 16-29 year olds in rural KwaZulu-Natal
- Between 2019-2022 we used the MRC framework to collect and analyse quantitative and qualitative data.
- Qualitative data were collected at two-time points to explore experiences, perceptions, and contextual influences from those delivering and receiving the intervention.
- Survey data was captured in REDCAP software to determine the intervention dose and reach
- Qualitative data were thematically analysed, and descriptive analysis was conducted with the quantitative data

Results

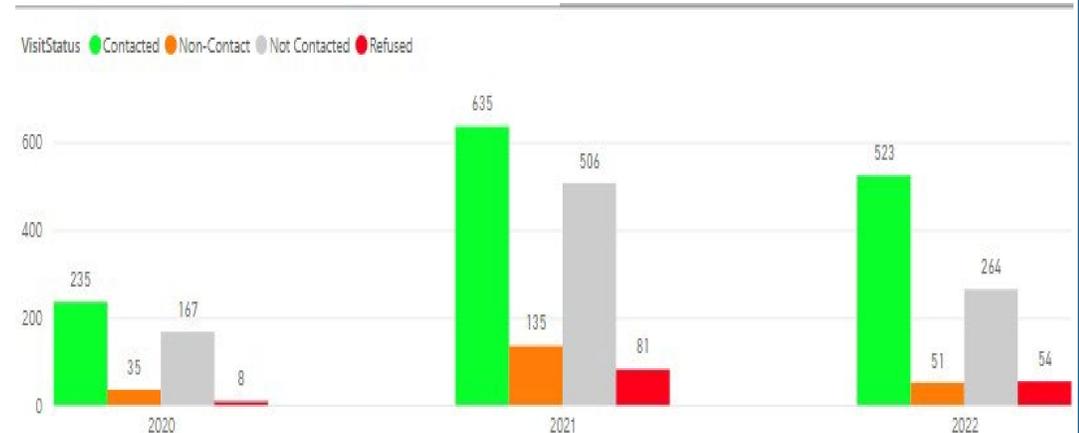
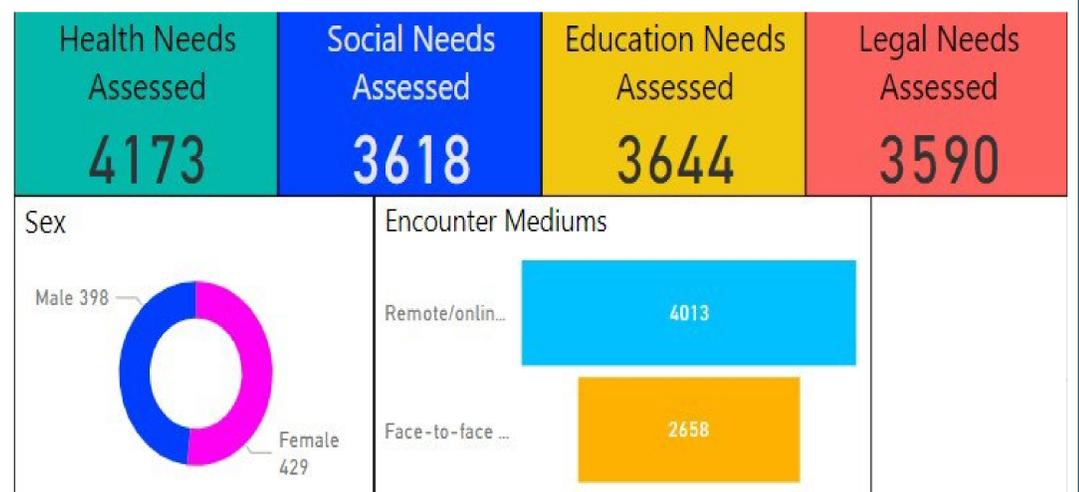
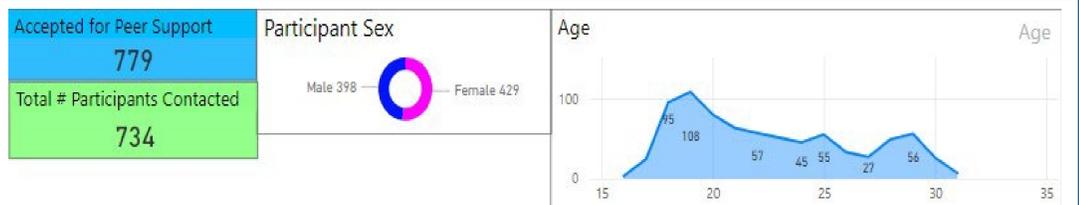
- A total of (N=779) participants were randomized to peer support, of which (N=734) participants were contacted
- Quantitative process data shows that N=675 (87%) randomized to peer support received peer support over two years. A total of 8218 visits were made to provide continued support, with participants being visited between 1 to 25 times
- A total of N=92 qualitative interviews were conducted with young people from both arms, clinical staff, refusals, peer navigators, and research assistants
- Preliminary qualitative findings demonstrate that peer-to-peer psychosocial support is acceptable to adolescents and youth. The service users and service providers felt that peers were able to deliver health promotion, including sexual and reproductive health. In particular, because they could refer young people to the AFYS.

“Yeah, I am also one of the people that benefit. I learn new things that I never knew about because of you guys. I didn’t know about this pill (PrEP). I heard about it from you guys first.... I can say it is very beneficial to talk to you because I learn a lot. (IDI, Male, 26yrs)”

- However, the peers felt less able to provide social, educational, and legal support

“After a person has shared their concerns or problems it is not easy to get them some help or assistance. This is because they would expect help from me whereas I would have told them that mine is to refer them to the right place where they can get assistance. They then don’t go get assistance because I will be notified if they have helped them but they end up not going where assistance is.” (P4, female)”
- Findings demonstrated a need for improved social assistance provided to participants as young people reported emotional distress including suicidal thoughts, rape, family disputes, neglect, and depression
- Families were seen as an important structure to both support and hinder HIV prevention among adolescents and youth

“The parent also needs to be encouraged to participate..... They need to be told even if one parent suspects that their child has started having sex, they need to speak out because if someone else tells them that their children have started having sex, they would think that he/she is jealous of their children or maybe say they will never be told by someone else about their children. (IDI, Female, 19yrs)”



- COVID-19 lockdowns between March 2020 and 2022 resulted in a shift from face-to-face contact to virtual support, impacting intervention delivery

Conclusion

- Peer-to-peer biosocial interventions can effectively mobilize young people for HIV and SRH
- However, resources for social and psychological support also need to be included in the package