



The DREAMS Evaluation Study 2018 Cross-Sectional Survey

**AGE-DISPARATE RELATIONSHIPS AND
THEIR ASSOCIATED HIV PREVALENCE FOR ADOLESCENT
GIRLS AND YOUNG WOMEN (AGYW) IN DREAMS
IMPLEMENTATION AREAS OF ETHEKWINI,
UMGUNGUNDLOVU IN KWAZULU-NATAL AND
CITY OF JOHANNESBURG (COJ) AND EKURHULENI IN
GAUTENG, SOUTH AFRICA**

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Background:

Adolescent girls and young women (AGYW) aged 15–24 years accounted for approximately one quarter of new HIV infections among individuals in sub-Saharan Africa in 2015. In South Africa, it is estimated that 66 200 new infections occurred among AGYW in 2017. This study aims to provide evidence on the increased HIV prevalence associated with age-disparate partnerships among AGYW in selected districts implementing DREAMS, an HIV prevention intervention aiming to reduce HIV incidence among the vulnerable AGYW in SA within two years (2015–2017).

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Methods:

We conducted a cross-sectional survey in four of the five DREAMS districts in KwaZulu-Natal (eThekweni and uMgungundlovu Districts) and Gauteng (City of Johannesburg and Ekurhuleni Districts). A multistage cluster random sample was used to first select small area layers, then households within these areas. All females in selected households who were between 12–24 years and were eligible for the study were offered participation in face-to-face interviews collecting sociodemographic, behavioural, and biological data. We recruited 18 296 participants into the study and conducted interviews between March 2017 and July 2018. Partnerships were split between same age and age disparate (> 5 years older). All data were weighted to be representative of the DREAMS implementation districts.

Results:

Over one-fifth (22.8%) of participants were 12–14 years old, 38.3% were 15–19 years old and 38.9% were 20–24 years old. Just over half (50.1%) of all participants had previously had sex; of those, nearly one third (32.3%, 95% CI: 31.1- 33.5) had engaged in age disparate sex.

Approximately, one quarter of sexually active 12–14 year olds (27.9%, 95% CI: 19.2, 38.6) and 15–19 year olds (26.1%, 95% CI: 24.3, 28.0) and more than one-third (35%, 95% CI: 33.5, 36.5) of sexually active 20–24 year olds engaged in age disparate sex.

The HIV prevalence for those who engaged in age disparate sex (18.0%, 95% CI: 16.5, 19.5) was significantly higher than for those who did not (12.9%, 95% CI: 12.0, 13.9, p -value<0.001).

Self-reported STI prevalence was also higher for those who engaged in age disparate sex (11.5%, 95% CI: 10.2, 12.9 compared to 7.2%, 95% CI: 6.5, 8.0 for those that did not).

Consistent condom use in the previous 12 months was lower for those who engaged in age disparate sex (16.9%, 95% CI: 15.3, 18.5 compared to 22.3%, 95% CI: 21.1, 23.6 for those that did not).

Those who engaged in age disparate sex in the previous year were more likely to experience physical or sexual intimate partner violence (22.4%, 95% CI: 20.4, 24.5 compared to 13.7%, 95% CI: 12.6, 14.9 those that did not).

Interpretation:

The results highlight the significant increased HIV prevalence in AGYW who engage in age disparate relationships.

They are also more likely to have elevated prevalence of sexually transmitted infections, reduced condom use and increased episodes of physical and intimate partner violence.

These findings highlight that interventions targeting age-disparate partnerships remain crucial to reducing the risk of exposure for young women in relationships with older men.

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