

# Best-Evidence Woman-Focused HIV Prevention



Intervention research has demonstrated that HIV is preventable for women through safer drug use and sexual practices. However, women who live in poverty experience unique social contexts that may challenge their attempts to reduce drug use and HIV risk, which also jeopardizes their children. With funding from sources such as the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA), the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA), the Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD), and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), RTI International has developed, implemented, and evaluated innovative interventions that target hard-to-reach populations, such as crack-using African-American women in North Carolina, injecting drug-using women in Russia, and Black/African and Coloured women in South Africa.

## Woman-Focused HIV Interventions

Under the direction of Wendee Wechsberg, PhD, several studies have been conducted to address sexual risk, substance use, and victimization among women around the world. These woman-focused interventions are organized on the principles of developing personal power by reducing substance abuse, strengthening negotiation skills for sexual protection, and preventing sexual violence and HIV. Women who participate in these studies are provided with realistic, culturally relevant prevention strategies that they can apply to their lives.



### Women's CoOp

#### Women's CoOp Study

To address the significant impact of HIV/AIDS among African-American women, Dr. Wechsberg and the research team on this project developed

and implemented a woman-focused HIV intervention in Raleigh and Durham, North Carolina, from 1999 to 2002.



This gender- and culture-specific intervention targeted crack-abusing African-American women who were not in treatment.

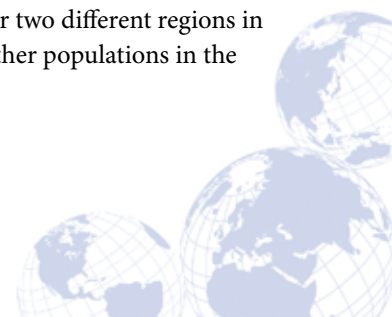
This woman-focused intervention was found to be a “best-evidence” HIV behavioral intervention by CDC.

#### Women's CoOp II

This continuation study (2004–2010) aims to determine the long-term effects of the original woman-focused intervention and booster sessions to help sustain reductions in risk. Women from the original Women's CoOp study were reenrolled to assess long-term changes in sexual behavior, substance use, victimization, and HIV status at baseline and at 6-, 12-, and 18-month follow-up periods.

#### Translating and Adapting Interventions to Other At-Risk Populations and Settings

While conducting the original Women's CoOp Study, Dr. Wechsberg and the research team began exploring ways to adapt this woman-focused intervention to other at-risk populations and settings. This woman-focused intervention has been translated and adapted for two different regions in South Africa, for Russia, and for other populations in the United States.



### Pregnant Women's Study

This NIDA-funded study modified and pilot tested the woman-focused intervention with pregnant African-American women in substance abuse treatment in North Carolina. This study enrolled women in a randomized trial to compare the woman-focused intervention tailored to pregnant women with the standard services offered in treatment programs. The research team also conducted 3- and 6-month follow-up assessments and collected birth outcomes.



### Adapting the Women's CoOp for At-Risk Teens (Young Women's CoOp)

This 5-year, CDC-funded study (2007–2012) will seek to adapt the Women's CoOp for at-risk African-American young women aged 16 to 18 in Raleigh and Durham, North Carolina. During this first

phase of the study, Dr. Wechsberg and the research team are soliciting input from young African-American women and other community stakeholders on how to adapt the intervention and refine other study materials. In the second phase, RTI will conduct a randomized trial with 400 teens to test the effectiveness of the adapted intervention relative to an attention-control intervention. The adapted intervention will address

- knowledge about HIV and other sexually transmitted infections (STIs)
- health consequences of alcohol and other drug use
- healthy relationships with males and females
- condom negotiation and communication with partners
- positive social supports
- HIV, STI, and pregnancy risk reduction
- violence prevention methods with partners, gangs, and others
- issues with returning to school and parenting.

Additional woman-focused projects around the world include the following:

**Sunnyside/Pretoria Women's CoOp–Pretoria**, 2001–2003; funded by NIDA

**Women's Health CoOp (WHC)–Pretoria**, 2003–2010; funded by NIAAA

**Woman-Focused HIV Prevention in Russia**, 2007–2009; funded by NIDA

**Cape Town Women's Health CoOp (Cape Town WHC)**, 2004–2006; funded by NIDA

**Woman-Focused HIV Prevention in the Western Cape**, 2007–2012; funded by NICHD

**Western Cape Couples' Health CoOp**, 2008–2013; funded by NIAAA

### Future Directions

Adaptations are currently under way with African-American college students, Latinas, and women in the criminal justice system. Because the woman-focused intervention can be adapted, translated, and tailored to a variety of settings and populations, Dr. Wechsberg and the research team are exploring additional settings where the Women's CoOp could be applied to help women and their partners reduce their risk of HIV, substance use, and experiences with violence and victimization.

### More Information

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