

Best-Evidence Woman-Focused HIV Prevention (Adaptations of the Women's CoOp)

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. RTI International has successfully developed, adapted, implemented, and evaluated innovative interventions that target these hard-to-reach populations in the United States, South Africa, and Russia.

Woman-Focused HIV Interventions

Under the direction of Wendee Wechsberg, PhD, multiple community-based trials have been conducted to test the effectiveness of a woman-focused intervention in addressing sexual risk, alcohol and other drug use, and victimization among women around the world. These woman-focused interventions are organized on the principles of developing personal power by reducing substance use, strengthening negotiation skills for sexual protection, and preventing sexual violence and HIV. These interventions provide access to HIV testing, active referrals to local treatment and substance abuse counseling services, female and male condoms, and skills in empowerment and negotiating with sexual partners. Participants are provided with realistic, culturally relevant prevention strategies that they can apply to their lives.

Women's CoOp Study, 1998–2002; National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA)

To address the significant impact of HIV/AIDS among African-American women, Dr. Wechsberg and the research team developed and implemented a woman-focused HIV intervention in Raleigh and Durham, North Carolina. This gender- and culture-specific intervention reached crack-abusing African-American women who were not in treatment. This woman-focused intervention was listed as a “best-evidence” HIV behavioral intervention by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

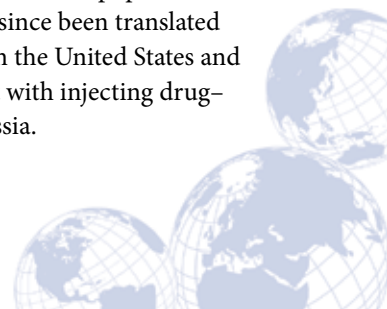


Women's CoOp II Study, 2004–2010; NIDA

The aim of this study was to determine the long-term effects of the woman-focused intervention and booster sessions to help sustain reductions in risk. Women from the original Women's CoOp study were re-enrolled 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 Evidence-Based HIV 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 the Women's CoOp to other at-risk populations and settings. This intervention has since been translated and adapted to other populations in the United States and in South Africa and in a small pilot with injecting drug-using women in St. Petersburg, Russia.



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North Carolina, United States

Pregnant Women's CoOp, 2005–2008; NIDA

This 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.

Young Women's CoOp, North Carolina, 2007–2012; CDC

This study is still in trial and seeks to help at-risk African-American women aged 16 to 19. The adapted intervention addresses alcohol and other drug use and its intersection with HIV risk behaviors and violence. The study also focuses on issues with returning to school, pregnancy and parenting, positive social supports, and healthy relationships.

South Africa

The Women's Health CoOp (WHC) in Pretoria, South Africa, 2003–2008; NIAAA

The WHC was adapted to reach sex workers and vulnerable women in Pretoria, South Africa. Study outcomes indicated that the woman-focused intervention may lead to greater skills in sustained HIV risk reduction, particularly with main partners. The 2009 USAID compendium report, *Integrating Multiple Gender Strategies to Improve HIV and AIDS Interventions: A Compendium of Programs in Africa*, cites WHC–Pretoria as a successful woman-focused, HIV prevention intervention in South Africa. The packaging of the WHC–Pretoria intervention in South Africa is currently under way. This package will expand implementation of the WHC intervention to a variety of settings across South Africa and other sub-Saharan African nations.

Western Cape Women's Health CoOp, 2007–2012; Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD)

This community-based randomized trial enrolled 720 women via a targeted sampling plan to test the effectiveness of combining voluntary counseling and testing with a woman-focused intervention.

Couples' Health CoOp in Cape Town, 2008–2013; National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA)

Recognizing the importance of partnerships, this community-randomized trial is focused on recruiting men in drinking establishments and their main female sexual partners to reduce alcohol and other drug use, violence, and sexual risk behaviors among couples and to promote healthy changes. In addition to the Women's CoOp, a man-focused intervention and a couples-focused intervention are also being tested.

Combination Prevention for Vulnerable Women in South Africa, 2011–2016; NIDA

This study is designed specifically to reach at-risk vulnerable alcohol and other drug using women and will be conducted in Pretoria with an existing implementation program. It will combine a biomedical intervention (i.e., testing, treating, and retention) with an evidence-based behavioral intervention (i.e., the WHC) to maximize the efficacy of both strategies.

The HOOP Study in Cape Town, 2011–2013; NIDA

This pilot study seeks to develop and evaluate a comprehensive, culturally sensitive, woman-centered model of care for pregnant South African women who use methamphetamine by adapting and refining the combination of the WHC and reinforcement-based treatment.

Future Directions

Adaptations are currently under way with African-American college students, Hispanic couples, and women in the criminal justice system. The woman-focused intervention can be adapted, translated, and tailored to a variety of settings and populations. References are available for completed projects.

More Information

Wendee M. Wechsberg, PhD
Senior Director
Substance Abuse Treatment Evaluations and
Interventions Research Program
919.541.6422
wmw@rti.org
www.rti.org/satei
RTI International
3040 Cornwallis Road, PO Box 12194
Research Triangle Park, NC 27709-2194 USA

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