



# WOMEN'S HEALTH CO-OP NEWSLETTER

## CAPE TOWN, SOUTH AFRICA, DECEMBER 2005



### Working in the Community, Supporting Women Where They Are

Our research mission is to help substance abusers in diverse communities in South Africa and the United States reduce drug use and other high-risk behaviors. Our goal is to assess drug abuse; treatment need; risks associated with sexually transmitted infections, including HIV; and physical, mental, and health problems. We also help women empower themselves to maintain healthier lives through skill building and referrals.

The purpose of the pilot Cape Town Women's Health Co-Op (CT - WHC) was to adapt a brief, woman-focused HIV prevention intervention—which was developed for drug-using women in North Carolina and then in Pretoria—for Black and Coloured high-risk drug-using women in Cape Town.

The CT - WHC, which was located in Observatory on Wesley Road, started early April through mid-November 2005. A total of 113 women (53 Coloured women and 60 Black African women) who were eligible were recruited into the pilot study.

The women were asked to participate in a series of four appointments, which included an assessment; and then a 2-session woman-focused intervention designed to reduce women's substance use, HIV risk, and risk for violence; and a follow-up interview one month later. Referrals were made as needed to

- STI and HIV clinics,
- The Rape Crisis Centre, and
- SANCA.

### CAPE TOWN STUDY FINDINGS

#### FORMATIVE PHASE

During the first phase of the study, focus groups were conducted with Black and Coloured South African women with a history of substance abuse. Both groups of women reported high rates of violence including rape, with Coloured women reporting more gang violence and woman-on-woman violence compared to Black/African women. These women also reported that they were more susceptible to violence when under the influence of drugs and/or alcohol. In their own words the women revealed the following:

*"Rape happens everyday."*

*"Women who drink are seen as cheap, having no values, lazy, [and] bad, and men think they can buy [them] for liquor."*

*"Sometimes there are men who will watch women drinking in the taverns. When the women leave to go home, the men will grab them, take them away to his place, and rape them."*

#### EXPERIMENTAL PHASE

The following is a profile of our study participants

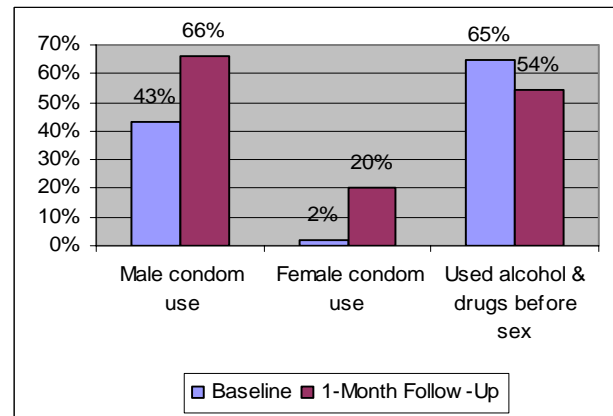
- *Age:* Average age was 27 years
- *Marital Status:* 23% were single
- *Education:* 36% had completed high school
- *Children:* 64% had given birth

#### FINDINGS AT 1-MONTH FOLLOW-UP

Out of 113 women who completed a baseline assessment, 112 (99%) returned for their 1-month follow-up assessment.

Results from the 1-month follow-up revealed positive changes in the participants sexual risk behaviors and substance use.

Boyfriend/Main Partner Risks



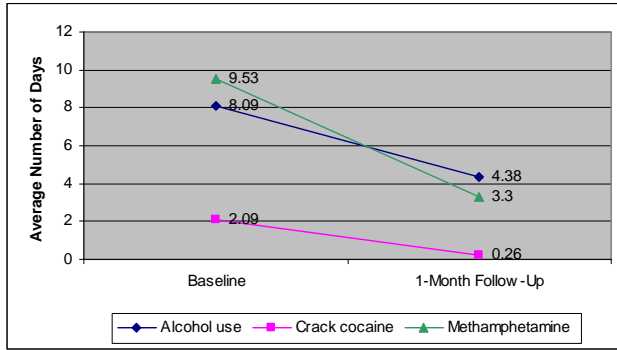
- The proportion of sexual acts in which a male condom was used significantly increased.
- The proportion of sexual acts in which a female condom was used also significantly increased.
- There was a decrease in the proportion of participants who reported using AOD during sex.

The Woman-Focused HIV Prevention in the Western Cape (Cape Town Women's Health Co-Op) is funded under grant number ROI DA11609-07S2 from the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA).

### THE METHAMPHETAMINE ("TIK") AND HIV CONNECTION

Methamphetamine ("TIK") use is a potential HIV risk because it can impair judgment and can make users forget about safer sex. Studies have shown that TIK users have higher numbers of sexual partners and more unprotected sex than non-TIK users. TIK can also be dehydrating, which may make women more prone to tears in the vagina, anus, or mouth, and therefore more prone to HIV/STD infections. TIK use is also dangerous for those already infected with HIV. TIK may decrease the effectiveness of HIV medication known as ART. It can also cause users to forget to take their HIV medications which may lead to drug resistance.

Average Number of Days Using Alcohol and Other Drugs Past 30 Days



- Overall, the frequency of past month alcohol use decreased by nearly 50% from baseline to follow-up.
- Significant reductions in past month substance use were also evidenced for crack cocaine and methamphetamine.

**FEEDBACK FROM PARTICIPANTS:**

*“It was a very brilliant idea to teach women how to help themselves. I want to say how happy it makes me feel to see how much you care about peoples health. May God bless you and give you more power to go on..”*

*“I enjoy this program very much. By attending, I realized that I am a strong human being and that no-one has the right, especially men, to go against my will. It has made me positive and strong. At the end of this journey you will have a new will to live.”*

**HOW TO REACH US:**

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**THANK YOU, RE A LBOGA, SIYABONGA, ENKOSI, DANKIE**

We would like to thank all the study participants, CAB members, and organizations that agreed to provide services for their continued support to make all of our projects successful collaborations. We look forward to building our scientific research base in South Africa and contributing to the fight against the spread of HIV/AIDS.

**OTHER STUDIES IN SOUTH AFRICA  
WOMEN’S HEALTH CO-OP IN PRETORIA**

The Women’s Health Co-Op is a 5-year study designed to reach a large sample of high risk women. The overall objective of the study is to obtain a better understanding of alcohol and other drug use and violence against sex workers and their relationship to HIV risk behaviours. The study also tests the hypotheses that a woman-focused intervention can help women not only reduce risks associated with HIV, but also address personal goals that could affect their ability to change the course of their lives. Preliminary outcomes from this study indicate that outreach to active substance abusers in South Africa is possible, and that brief interventions can reduce substance use and promote HIV risk reduction.

**NEW CAPE TOWN METHAMPHETAMINE SUPPLEMENT STUDY**

The South African Community Epidemiology Network on Drug Use (SACENDU) reported a countrywide increase in methamphetamine (aka “tik”) use in 2004. According to SACENDU the problem is particularly serious in Cape Town. Preliminary data from CT – WHC corroborate these findings and suggest that methamphetamine use may be a key primary illicit substance of abuse in some subpopulations. SACENDU findings also indicate that the problem of methamphetamine use is particularly serious among Cape Town’s youth. This study will examine how pervasive methamphetamine use is in poor township communities, particularly among younger females at risk for pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections, including HIV. This research is a necessary initial step prior to adapting an effective prevention/intervention for these at risk women.

**To be eligible for the Methamphetamine study:**

One must be a Black or Coloured female, ages 13-20, provide written consent to participate, and understand spoken English.

**FOR MORE INFORMATION**

For additional information on our other projects, please contact:

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