

Women's Global Health Imperative



RTI International's Women's Global Health Imperative (WGHI) conducts rigorous epidemiologic, biomedical, sociobehavioral, and implementation research to improve infectious disease and chronic health outcomes. These research findings inform the design, implementation, and scale-up of new programs, monitoring and evaluation systems, and health policies around the world—particularly as they pertain to addressing health inequities.

Currently, WGHI has ongoing research in the following areas:

- Interventions to improve uptake and optimize adherence to medications
- Engaging male partners in women's health and HIV risk reduction interventions
- Long-acting HIV pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) development and evaluation
- Increasing uptake of routine HIV testing, including via HIV self-testing
- End-user research to inform design of multipurpose prevention technologies (MPTs)
- Social and structural influences on adolescent reproductive health and well-being

Areas of expertise include the following:

- Mixed-methods, community-engaged research
- The intersection of violence, education, and economic opportunities on adolescent health
- Implementation, scale-up, and improvement of health services delivery
- Increasing engagement in HIV services among key and hard-to-reach populations
- The effects of poverty and gender-based violence (GBV) on women's health over the lifecycle

Featured Projects

Thin-Film Polymer Device for HIV Prevention (TIP)

The TIP Program, supported by the U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief through the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), is developing a novel HIV PrEP delivery system in the form of a subcutaneous implant to provide sustained release of an antiretroviral drug. We aim to improve the effectiveness, acceptability, usage, and accessibility of systemic delivery systems for HIV prevention.

Self-Testing in Africa (STAR)

This project is the largest evaluation of HIV self-testing in Africa to date; the STAR project is currently implementing, scaling up, and evaluating self-testing programming in six countries. The results will inform World Health Organization guidelines, support the establishment of appropriate policies, and encourage new manufacturers to enter the self-test market.

Microbicide Trials Network (MTN)

Through this collaboration with the National Institutes of Health-funded MTN, WGHI investigators chair protocols and serve as behavioral scientists on several pivotal HIV prevention trials, including studies of oral PrEP and the dapivirine vaginal ring (e.g., MTN-020/ASPIRE MTN-032/AHA; MTN-025/HOPE and MTN-034/REACH trials).

A Crecer—Salinas Teen Health Study

This study addresses gaps in research on structural and interpersonal factors in a rural, agricultural community in California that affect engagement in violence and sexual health risks during the transition from early to middle adolescence (13–16 years old). The research will identify protective factors that can support positive outcomes for teens to inform future interventions.



The Salinas field team stands outside one of the middle schools ready to recruit participants.

Tablets, Rings, and Injectables as Options (TRIO) and Qu4tro

These studies evaluate the acceptability of novel MPTs-HIV and pregnancy prevention delivery forms (e.g., oral PrEP, injections, vaginal rings, inserts, and films) among young women in sub-Saharan Africa. The goal of these studies is to inform product development to optimize end-user adoption.

TRIO

QU4TRO

Community Health Clinic Model for Agency in Relationships and Safer Microbicide Adherence (CHARISMA)

Through the development and testing of a clinic and community-based intervention, CHARISMA aims to increase women's agency to consistently and safely use microbicides while mitigating social harms, in particular intimate partner violence. CHARISMA is part of the USAID Microbicide Program Introduction Initiative (MPii), an international consortium of projects aiming to scale-up delivery of PrEP globally. WGHI is a partner on two other MPii projects: Enhancing Microbicide Uptake in High-Risk End Users (EMOTION) and Prevention Options for Women Evaluation Research (POWER).



The youth community advisory board at Desmond Tutu HIV Foundation (one of our collaborating partners based in Cape Town, South Africa) providing input for an end-user HIV prevention study.

Jikingo

Using a cluster-randomized trial design, we are exploring how the provision of HIV self-test kits to Kenyan women who exchange sex and are at high risk of HIV, can be used to (1) promote HIV testing among their sexual partners, (2) facilitate safer sexual decision-making, and (3) reduce their risk of acquiring HIV.

Development of a Male Alcohol Use and Intimate Partner Violence Reduction Intervention: Creating a Beautiful Home

This randomized controlled pilot intervention study is testing a combination of incentive-based and counselling approaches to mitigate male alcohol use and intimate partner violence among couples in Bangalore, India.

Partners, Funders, and Collaborators

WGHI maintains close relationships with the School of Medicine at the University of California, San Francisco, and the School of Public Health at the University of California, Berkeley, where our investigators serve as faculty members and collaborate on research projects. We also have more than 20 research partners at academic, research, and nonprofit organizations in India, Kenya, Malawi, South Africa, Uganda, the United Kingdom, the United States, and Zimbabwe.

WGHI projects are funded by a variety of organizations, including the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, CONRAD, Department for International Development (United Kingdom), International Partnership on Microbicides, National Institutes of Health (United States), Unitaid, USAID, The World Bank, and private foundations.

WGHI Core Scientific Staff

WGHI comprises 6 investigators as well as 11 research analysts and statisticians. The epidemiologists as well as biomedical and behavioral scientists at WGHI have developed an international reputation as experts in women's health.

Miriam Hartmann, MPH, investigates the role of gender on health, primarily in sub-Saharan Africa and India. Focusing on intervention development and research, she has created global ethical guidelines as well as monitoring and evaluation tools; she has also designed intervention approaches to mitigate GBV in the health, water and sanitation, and economic empowerment sectors.



Sue Napierala Mavedzenge, PhD, MPH, conducts behavioral, biomedical, and implementation research in HIV prevention and care. Her research focuses on sex workers, young people, and other hard-to-reach populations and includes the implementation and scale-up of HIV self-testing, combination approaches to increase engagement in HIV services, and novel methods for program evaluation.





Alexandra Minnis, PhD, MPH, researches strategies to intervene on social and structural factors that lead to reproductive health disparities among youth, with a particular focus on community violence and migration. She also conducts end-user research on novel biomedical products for HIV and pregnancy prevention among youth.



Elizabeth Montgomery, PhD, MHS, uses qualitative and quantitative methods to research the social and behavioral aspects of HIV prevention, predominantly in Southern Africa. Her research focuses on the social and contextual influences of women's acceptability, uptake, and sustained use of female-initiated methods; strategies to engage male partners and men; and end-user research to optimize adherence to long-acting HIV prevention methods.



Sarah Roberts, PhD, MPH, researches behavioral, social, and structural factors that increase the risk of HIV and other STIs among women and adolescent girls in sub-Saharan Africa. Her specific interests include the role of GBV, relationship dynamics, and social norms on uptake and adherence to PrEP and antiretroviral therapy.



Ariane van der Straten, PhD, MPH, is a Senior Fellow at RTI's Center for Global Health and WGHI's Director. She conducts research on female-initiated methods and adherence-related issues in the context of HIV prevention trials. She evaluates topical and oral pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) for preventing HIV/STIs in women and is actively involved in developing and evaluating new HIV prevention; MPTs; and drug delivery systems, including vaginal rings and long-acting biodegradable implants.

More Information

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